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# THE FAITH WE LIVE BY



# THE FAITH WE LIVE BY

AN EXPOSITION OF THE APOSTLES' CREED

By  
EARL L. DOUGLASS



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*To My Son and Daughter*

**ELISHA and DOROTHY**

*and*

*To Their Generation*

*Commending unto them with renewed  
confidence "those things which are  
most surely believed among us"*



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## THE CREED

I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost: The Holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints: The Forgiveness of sins: The Resurrection of the body: and the Life everlasting. Amen.



# I

## WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

CHRISTIANITY is a religion rooted and grounded in definite historical occurrences.

The New Testament makes this very plain.

In his First Epistle to the Corinthians (Ch. 15: 1-8), Paul restates the gospel as he had delivered it to his associates in that church. He declares that he had delivered to them that which he had also received, "how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen. . . ." He makes no mention here of any of the teachings of Jesus or *about* Jesus. The gospel according to Paul is not what anybody said or taught, not even Jesus himself; it is the good news that certain things had happened, that they had happened under the providence of God, and that they are the means whereby man is forgiven his sin and reconciled to God.

The rest of the New Testament is perfectly in accord with this declaration. Papias tells us that Mark's Gospel represents the preaching of Peter. It is largely a record of *events*. All the Gospels give a quite disproportionate amount of space to the last week of Jesus' life, describing, it is true, what he said, but describing especially

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what he did, and what was done to him. In his epistles, Paul dwells almost exclusively on the fact that Jesus is the divine Son of God, that his death redeems man from sin, his rising gives a new hope, his continued presence in the world gives a new and glorious power.

The Acts of the Apostles makes it even more clear that the earliest preaching was based on certain events that had taken place, rather than upon anything which had been said. There would probably have been no opposition from the authorities had the disciples confined their preaching to certain generalities about God. No doubt these authorities would have made but little protest even against preaching which consisted of a statement of what Jesus had said and done. The thing which aroused them to fury and drove them into a desperate policy of persecution was the fact that the disciples insisted on preaching Jesus. The disciples were commanded not to speak or teach "in the name of Jesus." What was happening—and the Sadducees knew that it presaged the eventual overthrow of their power—was that these "unlearned and ignorant men" under the power of the Holy Spirit were making a tremendous impression on the city by maintaining that Jesus, whom the leaders of Israel had crucified, was the Christ. Their preaching centered about a Person.

Important as the teachings of Jesus were, and are today, the first preaching plainly dealt with the significance of Jesus himself—who he was, what he had done, what God had done through him, and of what

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his present power consisted. The Acts particularly emphasize four things—that Jesus was the Messiah, that his death had been redemptive, that he had risen from the dead, and that, through the Holy Spirit, he was always present with his disciples.

This is not a message about what men thought of Jesus, or even about what Jesus taught. It is clearly a message concerning the significance of a Person, and the significance of that Person arises from the fact that he was involved in certain definite events which were linked up with the redemptive purpose of God.

It is for this reason that this chapter opens with the declaration that Christianity is a religion rooted and grounded in definite historical occurrences. In his splendid little volume entitled *Historic Christianity and the Apostles' Creed*,<sup>1</sup> J. K. Mozley says: "I am sure that we need to free ourselves from the idea that Christianity can be . . . anything else whatever except the grace of God, manifested and wrought out for Himself and into the fabric of the world through particular historical happenings. . . . The positive and unchangeable element in Christianity, the Christian thing, is God's action through Christ in history. Once that is grasped, other problems can be faced with a confidence that the inquirer has rock beneath his feet."

The Christian message was a gospel because the disciples went out to proclaim to the world that *something*

<sup>1</sup> Published by Longmans, Green & Co.

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*had happened.* God had visited and redeemed his people, and had raised up a horn of salvation for them in the house of his servant David. Their message was not merely an ethical message. It was even more than a new revelation; it was a new revelation that had occurred not primarily through the medium of supernatural visions, but through a series of events, in which, in an absolutely unique fashion, God's redemptive purpose had been shown forth in action.

The importance of this cannot be overemphasized, for the reason that every time men have lost the sense of the historical character of Christianity they have lost, first, the meaning of Christian faith, and, finally, Christian faith itself. Heresy has almost always arisen from a failure properly to acknowledge or appraise certain historical events. By the same token, reformation within the Church has always consisted, among other things, of a return to a wholesome realism with reference to the *facts* of our religion. Christian doctrines are not theories, much as those who scoff at all other aspects of religion save its practical aspects would have us believe. Doctrines are statements of certain things which happened, and of the meaning of these happenings. When Christian experience seeks any other basis than fidelity to the facts of sacred history, the issue must inevitably be disappointment and skepticism.

Particularly do we of this present generation need to keep this in mind. Modern Christianity is profoundly lacking in strong conviction. Furthermore,

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this is not widely recognized as a fault, but often cherished as a virtue. It is frequently regarded as a sign of broad-mindedness that a man should be skeptical about the historical events in connection with which Christianity arose in the first century. In fact, many claim that it makes no difference whether these be true or not; let any or all of them prove to be myths, the essential values of Christian revelation and faith would be unimpaired. If one believes in the divinity of Christ, what difference does it make, they ask, about the circumstances of his birth? What difference does it make whether he ever really lived or not? He has left us the picture of a perfect life. His teachings are true because they fit the needs of life and not because of the circumstances under which they were uttered, or the nature of the man who uttered them. Many people, quite serious in their desire to see the principles of Christ incorporated in human life and the kingdom of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, are equally serious in their contention that the teachings of the New Testament have supreme worth entirely apart from their truth or falsity as historical documents.

But this is a great mistake, and one against which the whole New Testament and the testimony of the primitive Church protest. Christianity was born in the stream of history. Those who believe they can deny the historical facts with which the New Testament deals and still enjoy the benefits which arise from the

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meaning of these facts, have the whole weight of human experience against them. For if the experience of two thousand years has taught anything, surely it has taught this: that when men disregard the happenings amidst which the Christian gospel was born, they soon fail in their apprehension of what God was doing for the soul of man through the Person who stood at the center of these circumstances. The earliest preaching consisted largely of the narration of certain things which had taken place. The disciples went out to tell the world that *something bad happened*. These things that happened are the *sine qua non* of the gospel. No proclamation of a supernatural revelation could possibly have set men's souls on fire as did the preaching of the original disciples, had not the burden of the message been that this supernatural revelation had taken place in the common walks of life in which men habitually move. The full meaning of the Incarnation is that God not only identified Himself with human flesh in the birth of Jesus, but that He identified Himself with humanity by providing that this same Christ should live his divine life by entering into history and playing his part therein. To minimize the importance of historical fact in Christianity is to minimize what apostolic preaching made central.

It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that a generation which, as Mozley has said, "sits loose to the historical side of the Christian revelation," should be easily satisfied with substitutes for the full gospel. One of

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these substitutes is benevolence. It is widely held that to be a Christian means to be well-disposed toward one's fellow men. Another substitute for the full gospel is a passion for Christian service. Those who hold that Christianity and human usefulness are synonymous terms usually make light of the doctrinal side of faith and throw themselves wholeheartedly into every enterprise designed to make the world a better place in which to live. There are those for whom social justice is the *summum bonum* of existence. Still others make the crusade against war their religion. Multitudes of thoughtful people believe that most of the troubles of life arise from a faulty economic order and that the first duty of the Christian is to work for the coming of that day when every man will have his just share of this world's goods.

That all these things are part and parcel of Christian faith no one can deny. Nor would any sincere Christian *want* to deny any such thing. The first and greatest commandment is twofold; and equal in importance with the injunction to love God, is the injunction to love our fellow men. But love for humanity is not Christianity; it is the result of Christianity. Paul, in response to the question of the Philippian jailor, "What must I do to be saved?" said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16: 31). It was after his confession that the jailor "took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes." Benevolence followed the confession of

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Christ as Saviour, not the other way about. The jailor became a Christian, and therefore well-disposed toward certain of his fellows whom up to that time he had disdained, when he believed on the divine character and saving power of a Person, the God-appointed Redeemer.

It is that Person who stands out as the central fact of the New Testament. We must learn this if our religion is to become more than a mere ethical system, an indefinite mystical experience, or a vague feeling of benevolence toward our fellow men. Jesus Christ is Christianity, because in his sacred person, and there alone, is to be found the divine revelation which gives Christianity its significance. And to say that Jesus Christ is Christianity is just another way of saying that deep and satisfying religious faith depends upon an unwavering fidelity to the facts of gospel history. There can be no substitute for this—neither philanthropy nor mysticism, neither passion for social justice nor personal righteousness. Faith comes first, and faith means not only a general trust in the purposes of God, but a very specific and comforting trust in those purposes as they were revealed in Jesus Christ.

This is the emphasis the New Testament makes, and such being the case, it is not surprising that a symbol of belief should early have arisen in the Christian fellowship, which largely consisted, so far as its statements about Christ are concerned, of a recital of happenings. The Apostles' Creed does not mention all the important

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elements of Christian faith, but its permanent value consists in the fact that it sets forth the historical facts through which God's revelation of his saving purposes was made once for all. It took its form from the New Testament. It dealt with facts because the New Testament, and the early preaching incorporated therein, dealt with facts. As a baptismal formula, as a confession of faith, as an instrument of defense in seasons of controversy, it served to keep the Church alert to the fact that Christianity is based on history, that it consists not of theories but of realities, not of anything under heaven save of revealed truth; and that this truth, while it might in the providence of God have been revealed in any one of a number of ways, was, as a matter of actual fact, revealed in certain well-attested occurrences which took place at a definite time in world history.

It does no good to rail at the lack of religious conviction which characterizes this modern age. We must look for the cause; and this we can do with the confidence that once we have found the cause we have taken a very encouraging step in the direction of cure. The principal cause appears to the present writer to be an inability on the part of many to appreciate the relationship existing between robust faith and a trusting and realistic facing of the facts of gospel history. Christianity swept out into a jaded and cynical world with the thrilling declaration that at a certain time and in a certain place something had happened which for

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all eternity was to change the relationship between lost man and a holy God. The Apostles went out to preach about these happenings. Their message dealt primarily with facts. That was the original emphasis; and if we would recapture the glory of that experience which shines from the pages of the New Testament we must, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, reflect as the first disciples did upon the facts amid which our faith was born.

Someone has said that "the first necessity is not to restate the Creeds, but to explain them.<sup>2</sup> The following chapters constitute an attempt to do this.

<sup>2</sup> *Essays in Orthodoxy*, by Quick. Macmillan.

## II

### THE RISE AND GROWTH OF AN APOSTOLIC CREED

How did the Apostles' Creed come into being? Who first conceived it, and when was it earliest expressed?

A legend, said to have made its appearance first in the early Middle Ages, runs as follows: "On the tenth day after the Ascension, when the disciples were gathered together for fear of the Jews, the Lord sent the promised Paraclete. And when he had come as a flaming fire and they were filled with the knowledge of all tongues, they composed the symbol. Peter said: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. Andrew said: And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord. James said: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of Mary the Virgin. John said: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. Thomas said: Descended into Hades, on the third day rose from the dead. James said: Ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Philip said: Thence he is about to come to judge the quick and dead. Bartholomew said: I believe in the Holy Spirit. Matthew said: Holy Catholic Church, communion of saints. Simon said: Remission of sins. Thaddaeus said: Resurrection of the flesh. Matthias said: Life eternal."

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This, of course, is mere legend. It was early questioned even within the Church itself, and in these latter days practically no one arises to champion such an account of its origin.

In all probability the Apostles' Creed must be regarded as apostolic in its content rather than in its form. The so-called Roman Symbol, from which the present creed undoubtedly grew, did not make its appearance until about the year 350. However, we are not justified by this fact in accepting the extreme views of certain recent scholars who contend that the Apostles' Creed is a late document put together centuries after the death of Christ, and called the Apostles' Creed because of the undoubted authority that apostolic origin would give such a statement of faith. Such views are a part of the general school of criticism which maintains that all documents relating to the Christian faith were written long after the events they describe; but this view, as it applies to the Apostles' Creed, is not borne out by the facts.

There undoubtedly existed from the earliest days of the Church's life a definite and well-formed consensus of opinion as to what Christ had taught and what his coming into the world meant to believers. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans speaks of "that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you" (Rom. 6: 17). The Epistle to the Hebrews makes mention of "the principles of the doctrine of Christ" (Heb. 6: 1, 2), and enumerates these principles in such order as to suggest

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that even at that early date some sort of creed was in widespread use in the Church. Paul warns the youthful Timothy to "keep that which is committed to thy trust" (1 Tim. 6: 20), referring in the same chapter to "the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness" (1 Tim. 6: 3).

But the Christian creeds of all varieties, and the Apostles' Creed in particular, go back in origin to the very ministry of Jesus. The first Christian creed was the confession of Peter. Upon that confession of faith in him as Lord and Messiah, Jesus declared he would build his Church. Evidently the episode at Caesarea Philippi established the custom among the disciples of guarding the purity of revealed truth by an unwavering testimony as to how that revelation was made. There is a definiteness about the Christian revelation which in every age has been the comfort and support of believers; and this definiteness goes back to the days of the Apostles themselves when, probably from the hour of their first witnessing at the time of Pentecost, they felt divinely constrained to make the facts of the gospel the basis of their testimony.

The Book of the Acts seems to indicate that the earliest confession demanded of converts was simply in the lordship of Jesus. We are told that on Pentecost Peter exhorted his hearers to "repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2: 38), and that those who were converted "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2: 42). The first con-

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verts were not required to subscribe to an elaborate creed; they simply acknowledged Jesus as Lord. The Ethiopian eunuch declared, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8: 37), and the Philippian jailor was told "to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 16: 31) if he would be saved. It is particularly significant that the earliest confessions were confessions of faith in the divine power of the person of Jesus.

The Apostles' Creed in its present form is divided into three parts: the first dealing with God, the second with Christ, and the third with the Holy Spirit. The earliest "form of doctrine" was undoubtedly a very simple confession in Jesus Christ as Messiah, and from this simple formula of faith grew the creed as we now have it. The earliest confessions found in the New Testament, with one exception, had to do only with the spiritual significance of Christ himself.

The exception was the so-called baptismal formula, found in Matthew 28: 19, 20. Jesus gives his last instructions to his disciples in the following words: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Simple as the "form of doctrine" was in the beginning—merely an earnest declaration of belief in the lordship of Jesus—it was natural that the form of words which the

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Lord himself had used should at last become the framework upon which a more elaborate creed was built.

The New Testament creed appears to have been a very simple one—a declaration of trust in Jesus Christ as divine Saviour. The injunction of Christ to his disciples, however, involving the use of the words “Father . . . Son . . . and Holy Ghost,” suggested quite early the form of a longer and more detailed statement of faith.

We come to the year 100 A.D. and still there is no record of a creed which resembles the Apostles’ Creed in its present form; nothing more than the injunction that converts shall acknowledge Jesus as Lord. In the epistles of Ignatius,<sup>1</sup> who was probably a child about the time Paul was carrying on his great missionary labors, we find the first hint that the baptismal formula of our Lord was beginning to influence the form in which Christian faith was confessed. Ignatius had a friend and pupil, Polycarp by name, who is said also to have been a pupil of the Apostle John. In his epistle to the Philippians,<sup>2</sup> Polycarp mentions several essential beliefs, which include something more than a mere confession that Christ is Lord. Polycarp died a martyr in 155 (or 156) A.D., at a great age. There were now no persons of distinction in the Church who had fellowshiped with Jesus or his Apostles. Justin Martyr

<sup>1</sup> *Trallians* C. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Philippians* C. 2.

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in his writings<sup>3</sup> used certain words and expressions which have led some to believe that he was familiar with that form of creed known as the Roman Symbol from which our present Apostles' Creed undoubtedly grew. But the connection is only by inference. It is in the writings of Irenaeus, about 170 A.D., that we first find a statement of faith which begins to sound like the Apostles' Creed as we know it.

Note the familiar sound of these words from the writings of Irenaeus: "For the Church . . . (has) received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God, the Father Almighty who made heaven and earth, and the seas and all that is in them, and in one Christ Jesus the Son of God who was made flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Ghost who preached through the prophets the dispensations and the advents, and his birth of a Virgin, and his suffering and his rising from the dead, and the ascension in the flesh of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ into heaven, and his coming from heaven in the glory of the Father . . . to raise up all flesh of the human race . . . that . . . He may execute just judgment on all . . . bestowing life on the just and holy . . . (and) may give them immortality and make them partakers of eternal glory."<sup>4</sup>

Now this is not the Apostles' Creed, of course, but it begins to sound something like it. It is quite an elaboration of the simple declaration of faith demanded

<sup>3</sup> *Apol.* 1.61, 1.21, 31, 42, 46. *Dial.* 85, 132.

<sup>4</sup> *Contr. Haer.* 1. 10.

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of converts a hundred years previous, when most of the New Testament was being written. The greater part of Irenaeus' labors extended from about the year 150 A.D. through the remainder of the century. Both Tertullian<sup>5</sup> and Cyprian,<sup>6</sup> the former writing about the year 200 and the latter fifty years later, make references to Christian belief which justify the conclusion that the simple confessions of the New Testament were growing in length and complexity and including many more beliefs than the mere confession that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Tertullian and Cyprian undoubtedly knew of the existence of a fixed form of confession and probably quoted from it. Not until the year 340, however, do we encounter a definite statement of faith, a fixed form, having at its core the simple confession of belief made by early believers and recorded in the New Testament, particularly the Book of the Acts. A certain Marcellus, Bishop of Ancyra, who had been exiled from his diocese by Arian heretics, went to Rome to defend himself before the Pope, and on his departure left with Bishop Julius a statement of his faith. It was written in Greek and sounds, when translated, very much like the Apostles' Creed as we know it today.

Fifty years later Rufinus, a priest of Aquileia, writing in Latin about a creed used in his native city, compared it with what has since come to be known as the Roman

<sup>5</sup> *De Praescr.* 36, 12, 37.

<sup>6</sup> *Ep. 76 ad Magnum.*

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Symbol. This symbol is brief, very much to the point, and we can with assurance conclude that this is the creed upon which the Apostles' Creed, as we know it today, is built. Rufinus believed that it represented the faith as taught by the Apostles, and he accounts for its brevity by saying that the church at Rome was less troubled by heresies than were many of the other churches, particularly eastern churches.

Here is the Roman Symbol which forms the basis of the Creed as we know it today:

I believe in God the Father Almighty;  
And in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord;  
Who was born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary;  
Was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was buried.

The third day he rose from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;  
From whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead;  
And in the Holy Ghost;  
The Holy Church;  
The forgiveness of sins;  
The resurrection of the body (flesh).

Now does this mean that this so-called Roman Symbol was first composed about the year 350 or 400? Not at all. Scholars date it—at least in its original shorter form—as early as the year 150 A.D., and one of the greatest authorities on the history of creeds<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Burn, *An Introduction to the Creeds* (1899), p. 64.

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says that it can be assumed to have come into existence from 100 to 120 A.D. The indication seems to be that a fixed form of doctrinal statement arose quite early and that probably Ignatius, Polycarp, and Justin Martyr, and certainly Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian wrote their statements of faith already quoted with a knowledge of this fixed form in mind. Scholarship will probably never be able to indicate exactly when a fixed form of words was composed, but the weight of evidence seems to favor the contention that it was composed and used in the Church very early. Some Roman Catholic scholars still believe that it may have been composed by the Apostles themselves, but this is not probable. Many believe that it made its appearance the latter part of the first century or very early in the second century. Certainly Irenaeus and Tertullian were familiar with it. One scholar thinks it cannot be dated earlier than 150 A.D.<sup>8</sup> All, however, are agreed that it was known to the leaders of the early Church; and while it is never possible to speak with too much assurance on a matter of this sort, an unbiased reading of all opinions seems to favor an early date rather than a late one.

But why, if a fixed form of confession existed early in the second century, was this fixed form not more generally known until almost the beginning of the fifth

<sup>8</sup> McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed* (1902), p. 9. Scribners.

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century? For a reason that is now well understood by all students of the subject.

The fixed form of confession, which we now call a creed, was used at the time of baptism. After passing through a long period of probation, candidates for admission to the membership of the Christian Church were given the creed. Strange as it may seem, the creed was a secret formula disclosed to the convert only after he had passed through a long period of training and probation and *just before he received baptism*. Augustine says it was kept secret that the Biblical declaration might be fulfilled, "This is the covenant that I will make. . . . I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them." Others seem to think that it was not publicly disclosed in order to guard against additions which heretical sects might be tempted to make. Also, the general secret character of the early Church because of persecution may have had something to do with it. At any rate, it is perfectly clear that the creed was in the beginning a secret formula, guarded from the world and kept from candidates for admission into the Christian fellowship until they were ready to take the final step of baptism.<sup>9</sup>

One thing more needs to be said about the origin of the Creed: *It was most intimately associated with*

<sup>9</sup> See Lumby, *History of the Creeds*, p. 11.

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*the struggle against heresy which convulsed the early Church for several centuries.*

We catch a hint in the Epistles of Paul that false teachers were arising in the Church. The Apostles and the early Church had to struggle first with the Jews who wanted to preserve in the Christian Church all the practices of Judaism, and then with the Gentiles, for the most part those who were known as Gnostics. They got their name from the Greek word meaning "to know." They claimed to be the religious *intelligentsia* of their day. Their heresy largely consisted of an attempt so to exalt the divine nature of Jesus that his true humanity was lost.<sup>10</sup>

What a contrast this is with modern heretical tendencies! The present-day heretic is one who so emphasizes the humanity of Jesus that his divine significance is lost. In the early days of the Church, however, the heretics went off into the wildest possible metaphysical speculations and emphasized to the point of distortion the supernatural character of Jesus. Among other things they practically discarded the Old Testament and said that the creator God was not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. They denied that the Christ had ever been crucified, maintaining that the heavenly being Christ had temporarily taken up his abode in the body of Jesus at the time of baptism and forsaken him just before the crucifixion. Some went even so far as

<sup>10</sup> Schaff-Herzog article on Gnosticism.

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to declare that the birth, life, and death of Christ had been in semblance only.

There was one of these Gnostics, Marcion,<sup>11</sup> a ship-master of Pontus, who was especially troublesome. He must have been a man of rare personality. He lived an unusually saintly life and was severely ascetic in character. His influence with the masses was said to have been tremendous. Shortly after his conversion he went to Rome, and in gratitude for the rich new life he had achieved through faith, he made a present to the Church of Rome of 200,000 sestertii.

Soon after, he began to advocate strange doctrines. Like all the other Gnostics, he believed in an infinitely perfect, almighty, and holy God, the God of the New Testament who is the Father of Jesus Christ; and the so-called Demiurge, a subordinate being of limited power who was the God of the Old Testament. He differed from the general run of Gnostics in certain doctrinal details, and especially in the fact that his interest was practical and ascetic while theirs was speculative. In spite, however, of his upright life and his simple and very sincere devotion to Jesus Christ as he knew him, we can readily see from the vantage point of modern life that if Marcion and the Gnostics had triumphed, Christianity would soon have vanished from the earth. They were heretics in the truest sense of the term, even though many of them were sincere and

<sup>11</sup> Schaff-Herzog article on Marcion.

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of good moral character. But the orthodox Church won the day for reality over speculation, and the true gospel was established as a living faith among men.

Now there can be little doubt that in this struggle with enemies within their household, the Church made good use of the Creed. There are some who believe that the Creed came into being about the year 150 A.D. as an instrument for straining Gnostics out of those groups who were applying for admission to the Christian fellowship. It is probably nearer the truth to say that a fixed form of Christian confession existed long before the Gnostic controversy waxed hot, and that it was an invaluable instrument of defense when the hour of battle arrived. Also the form of the Creed may have been very profoundly influenced by the Church's struggle against heresy. The inclusion of certain declarations and the exclusion of others, equally if not more important, lends support to this view. The insistence on the real humanity of Jesus which pervades the second section of the Creed and the declaration that the God and Father of Jesus Christ was also the creator of heaven and earth seem to be well-directed blows at certain Gnostic heresies. The origin of the Creed is shrouded in a mystery that time will probably never dispel; but the fact that its present form was at least in some measure influenced by the determination of the Church to keep its life and teaching free of the destructive teachings of the Gnostics, is beyond reasonable doubt.

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Calvin, as he closes an exposition of the Creed, makes this interesting comment on its origin and spiritual authority: "I style it the Apostles' Creed, but am not at all solicitous to know who was the composer of it. The ancient writers agree in ascribing it to the apostles, either from a belief that it was written and published by their common concurrence, or from an opinion that this compendium, being faithfully collected from the doctrine delivered by them, was worthy of being sanctioned by such a title. And whoever was the author of it, I have no doubt that it has been publicly and universally received as a confession of faith from the first origin of the Church, and even from the days of the apostles. Nor is it probable that it was composed by any private individual, since from time immemorial it has evidently been esteemed as of sacred authority by all the pious. But what we ought principally to regard, is beyond all controversy—that it comprehends a complete account of our faith in a concise and distinct order, and that everything it contains is confirmed by decisive testimonies of Scripture. This being ascertained, it is of no use anxiously to inquire, or to contend with anyone, respecting its author, unless it be not sufficient for any one to have the unerring truth of the Holy Spirit, without knowing either by whose mouth it was uttered, or by whose hand it was written."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Institutes*, Book II, Ch. 16, Sec. 18.

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In summary, therefore, the following can with confidence be said: that there was a well-defined "form of doctrine" in the Christian Church when Paul wrote his Epistles and when the Book of the Acts was composed; that venerable figures like Ignatius and Polycarp, whose lives overlapped the lives of the Apostles, seemed to write about Christian faith in a way that indicated some knowledge of a fixed form of words, or as we would say today, a creed; that certainly Irenaeus and Tertullian, between 170 and 200 A.D., knew of the existence of such a creed; and finally, that the Roman Symbol about which Rufinus speaks in the year 490 and which Marcellus had reproduced in Greek a half century before, is undoubtedly the baptismal formula, early in origin, and the creedal form from which grew the Apostles' Creed as we know it today.

With the passing centuries the Roman Symbol was gradually expanded. The Apostles' Creed in its present form first appeared in the writings of a certain Pirminius about the year 730 A.D.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Baird, *Christian Fundamentals*, p. 24. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. II, p. 532, note 3, says 750 A.D. Scribners.

### III

“I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY,  
MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH”

It is neither easy, nor perhaps necessary, to write about the existence of God. It is like carrying coals to Newcastle. Most people acknowledge the fact of God's existence, and those who do not might be very little affected by argument. Furthermore, most people today believe in God, not so much because they were converted to such a belief as because they were born into families where the existence of God was taken for granted. Therefore to write on this subject seems almost superfluous. It is unnecessary for those who believe and unconvincing to those who doubt.

As a matter of fact, the existence of God cannot be proved—that is, not in the same way we prove that two and two make four, or that the force of gravitation operates according to a certain formula—and the Apostles' Creed makes no pretense whatsoever to prove the existence of God. It is not a declaration of philosophical opinions, but a statement of vital religious convictions. It is the disclosure, not of what men have thought, but of what God has revealed.

Some people have the idea that it is possible to reason without admitting any presuppositions. But we can

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no more discuss anything without taking something for granted than we can run a footrace without ground to run on and feet to run with. We must start somewhere in a foot race; we must start somewhere in reasoning. Religious reasoning begins with the conviction that God has made a revelation of his purposes for man. Deny that, and reasoning on religious matters never gets started. The Apostles' Creed has nothing to say to an arrant disbeliever. If a man scoffs at the possibility of revelation, the Creed will teach him nothing. Those who are in the habit of using theological terms say that religious reasoning begins with the canon of revelation, which for the man in the street means that the starting point for religious thought and experience lies in the conviction that God has disclosed to man through revelation certain truths about His character and purposes.

Common sense, entirely apart from revelation, leads us to certain rather definite conclusions about the existence and nature of God. The presence of a well-functioning universe round about us leads us to believe, on the basis of common sense, that there must have been a first cause or a creator of this order. Napoleon on his Egyptian expedition was listening one evening to the learned discussion of certain philosophers whom he had taken with him to study the ancient cultures. They were discussing the nature of the created universe, and the consensus of opinion was that it was unnecessary

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to assume a creator in order to account for things as they are. This could all be accounted for, they maintained, by the working of natural laws. Pointing to the starry heavens above, Napoleon asked, "Gentlemen, who made these?"<sup>1</sup> His robust common sense led him to sweep aside the tortuous reasoning of academicians and ask a sensible question on the basis of reality.

It is hard to see how people can have such astounding credulity as to believe that anything as complicated and marvelous as the created universe could just have happened. Some one has said, "I would just as readily expect to drop the letters of the Greek alphabet upon the ground and pick up an *Iliad* or an *Odyssey* as to expect the standard processes of nature to have come by chance."<sup>2</sup> The contention that what is has happened by the blind working of natural law is too illogical for anyone but the overeducated to believe. It violates the first principles of common sense.

The second conclusion to which common sense leads us as we view the world about us is that inasmuch as the whole of the natural order seems to be operating under the impulse of some unabating force, the same power that created the universe seems to be sustaining it. The sun goes forward on its orbit at the rate of sixty-six million miles per hour and finishes its prescribed course without the loss of a second. From the

<sup>1</sup> See *Things Most Surely Believed*, Macartney, p. 14. Cokesbury Press.

<sup>2</sup> *What Is Left of the Apostles' Creed*, by Edwards, p. 22. Abingdon Press.

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smallest thing observed through a microscope to the largest thing viewed through a telescope, nature appears to be working according to certain patterns that do not vary. If common sense leads us to conclude that some conscious and wise power first brought the universe into being, it leads us further to conclude that this same power is still at work causing the created order to function.

Common sense, entirely apart from revelation, leads us to the further conviction that this conscious and wise power is also personal. We know of nothing, in this world at least, higher than personality. If God has our lower attributes—power, will, and the ability to make choices—He must have our highest attribute, personality. Wisdom and personality go together. If this higher power exhibits wisdom, it undoubtedly has personality. If it does not have personality, then it has endowed the creature with something higher than it possesses; and this, of course, is outside the pale of logic. Common sense revolts at such an absurd suggestion.

So common sense takes us a considerable distance in our search after the nature of God; but it does not take us far enough. It gives us a God who is powerful enough to create the universe and sustain it, and probably personal. But this is not the God of religion. No one falls down and worships what Herbert Spencer called “an infinite and eternal energy from which all things proceed.” *Revelation alone can give us a Being*

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*worthy of our worship and our trust.* When we ask deep and searching questions about destiny, we turn not to the telescope, the microscope, or the scientific textbook; we turn to the Bible. When sorrow leaves us stunned and groping, we think little or not at all about the God who keeps the planets on their courses; we long for the eternal God who is our refuge, and for the Everlasting Arms by which we may be supported. Common sense is all right as far as it goes, but it can never go far enough to lead us into warm communion with the living God. It takes religion, and revealed religion, to do that.

Now the Apostles' Creed is not an apology for theism; it is an earnest declaration about revealed religion. If it were a statement of philosophical principles, it would begin, "I believe there is a God . . . and that Jesus Christ is his Son. I believe there is a Holy Spirit." But it does not so run. It says, "I believe *in* God . . . and *in* Jesus Christ . . . and *in* the Holy Spirit." There is a vast difference between believing a thing and believing *in* it. Tell me something about the marvelous intricacies of a wasp's eye, or the peculiar behavior of electrons under certain controlled conditions, or the almost miraculous efficacy of some drug in the cure of disease, and if you are sufficiently an authority on the subject I will believe you. To believe a thing means to acknowledge it; but to believe *in* a thing means to trust it. We *believe* scientific discoveries; we believe *in* principles, friends, and God.

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The Creed, which is the majestic herald of revealed religion, begins with the declaration, "I believe *in* God. . . ." That is, my convictions about Him lead me to trust Him, to put my life in his hands, to stake my all on his power and his love. The Creed is not the minimum statement of belief, but the maximum. It tells us not what a man can believe and still be reasonable, but what he must believe to be saved.

It states three very definite things about God. First, it declares a belief in his Fatherhood. "I believe in God, the Father. . . ." It is interesting to note that the first and last recorded utterances of Jesus both contained the word Father. When his parents found him, a lad in the Temple, his question was, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2: 49.) As he expired on the cross, Luke tells us that he cried out, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23: 46.) The word was on his lips probably times without number.

He acknowledged the kingship of God, his power and his majesty, but it was upon the love and tenderness of God that he delighted most to dwell. He said on one occasion, "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14: 6.) A man could come to the creator, perhaps, without Christ. His common sense would lead him almost so far. But if a man is to know the love of God, he must learn it at the feet of Jesus; and he learns it there because Jesus was

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conscious of that love with a conviction and fullness that only the divine Son of God could possess. To him the power and majesty of God, wonderful as these were, stood aside for an even higher attribute of God—namely, his love. It was by love that God would redeem the world—by that foolishness of God which Paul says is wiser than men.

Even as a child Jesus had caught sight of something in the nature of God which the noblest of the prophets saw only dimly. When asked to state the greatest commandment, he said, "Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God . . . and thy neighbor as thyself." (Mark 12: 29-31.) And this was because when he thought of God he thought of a loving Father, of One who had humbled himself in the incarnation and who had "sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (John 3: 17.)

It is fitting, therefore, that the Christian Creed should begin with a declaration about God's love. It declares that Christian faith rests securely not just upon a belief in God, but upon the comforting assurance that this same God loves his children to the point of redemption and watches over them as a father watches over his children.

The second thing the Creed tells us about the nature of God is that He is almighty.

Some curious notions have arisen in modern times about the power of God. Some have said that his

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power is limited—He would like to do certain things if He could, but the plain truth of the matter is that He can't. Others have held that even God is subject to the law of growth, and that while his power is limited now it will, with the passing of time, become absolute. The proponents of this "faith" patronizingly confess that the Deity appears to be making quite commendable progress, but the stark reality we confront is that so far as the present is concerned He is far from being in control of His universe.

All such ideas are of course quite at variance with the Biblical conception of God. The Bible teaches that God is almighty, and that his absolute control of his universe is consistent with his loving purpose. We may not be able to reconcile the perfect power and the perfect love of God. Their existence and harmony are postulates of faith. But on the seemingly contradictory contentions that God is in perfect control of the universe and yet loves sinful man who defies his control, Christian faith is securely based. There can be no such thing as faith in the New Testament sense of that term without a deep and unwavering belief in the sovereignty of God.

It has previously been observed that this age is particularly prone to deny the supernatural element in religion. The reluctance to affirm the sovereignty of God undoubtedly arises from this tendency. Naturalistic religion can never give us a God to whom we can attribute complete sovereignty. If our faith in a

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God who is almighty would remain unshaken amid injustice and wickedness, we must turn to the authoritative Word of God for an assurance which the circumstances of life can never give. The conflict between good and evil is too tremendous for our little minds and our limited experience to understand. We must seek in revealed religion, and there alone, the assurance that God still rules.

The Bible gives us such assurance. God is the creator of all that is and the sustainer thereof. His arm reaches out into the heavens; his providence arranges the details of every man's life. The very hairs of our heads are numbered. Not a sparrow falls to the ground but God notes its falling. Both the Old and New Testaments agree in attributing to God a power that is absolute; yet not the power of an arbitrary despot, but the power of One whose control never conflicts with his love.

The declaration, "I believe in God the Father Almighty," constitutes the triumph of Christian faith over the circumstances of a world in which the purposes of evil appear only too often to have won their victory over the purposes of God.

"Maker of heaven and earth."

In the first part of this chapter, mention was made of the extent to which common sense leads us to see the inevitability of divine creation. Here is a world—*something or someone* must have brought it into being. The logical mind of man revolts against the idea that

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everything that is has been produced by the working of natural law. "What is behind natural law?" is the next inevitable question. The Bible answers in the very first sentence of the first book—God is behind creation. Common sense may lead us to see the necessity of a creative force; the Bible calls this natural force God and identifies Him with the loving Father of our Lord Jesus.

Modern religious thinking has not given sufficient consideration to this matter of creation. Its religious significance is indicated by the fact that it is the first thing with which the Word of God deals. Men have fallen into squabbling groups over the question *how* God created the world. The important thing is that "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen. 1: 1.) That is, there was a force exerted in the beginning which resulted in the emergence of life and its environment. Unless we are very much mistaken, Christian thinkers will in future years be much more occupied in thinking about the spiritual significance of divine creation than they have been in the past. Men pass that by lightly today. They look to science to explain creation when the very best science can ever be expected to do is to describe it.

After science has said its last word—if that day ever arrives—religion will have something to say infinitely more glorious than science can ever affirm. That something is indicated in certain statements which the Bible makes about the spiritual significance of creation. "In

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the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Gen. 1: 1.) “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things that do appear.” (Heb. 11: 3.) “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.” (Ps. 33: 6.) “All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.” (John 1: 3.)

Thus does the Word of God maintain that creation is primarily a religious rather than a scientific matter. It lies close to the heart of faith. The God who redeems life is the God who made it. There is a mystery and glory about divine creation which will probably always be veiled from our eyes; but before this mystery the believer stands with joy unspeakable as he ponders the significance of the words, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.”

“The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills, and the plains—

Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him who reigns?”

## IV

### “AND IN JESUS CHRIST HIS ONLY SON OUR LORD”

THE word “Jesus” is a name; the word “Christ” is a title. The name and title together mean Jesus the Christ, or the Messiah.

It is to be expected that the opening declaration of the Creed about the nature, power, and character of God should be followed by a statement about Jesus Christ. The second section of the Creed contains almost twice as many words as all the rest of the Creed combined. It has been noted elsewhere that the earliest Christian confession of which we have any record was a confession of the Lordship of Jesus. Those who created the ancient symbol of faith were careful that it should constitute a statement of the nature, purpose, and work of Christ about which there could be no doubt. As the ancient symbol passed through generations of controversy, certain statements were amplified and details introduced; yet from the beginning the purpose of the Creed was undoubtedly to show the relationship which the person of Christ bore to the divine scheme of salvation.

It is very significant that the Creed contains no single reference to the teachings or the miracles of Christ. It is concerned primarily, not with what he said and did,

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but with what he was. Much impressed as the disciples undoubtedly were by the words they had heard Jesus utter and the wonderful works they had seen him perform, they were even more impressed by the fact that this man is the divine Messiah sent by God for men's salvation. The early apostolic preaching was an attempt to persuade men to believe this. A concise account of what Jesus said and did was not written down in the form with which we are now familiar until some years after Jesus' death; but from the very first day the gospel was proclaimed, the Lordship of Jesus and the significance of his person as a Saviour were made the chief burden of the Apostles' message.

It was what Jesus Christ *was* that impressed both his friends and his enemies. How much Jesus knew of his own divine significance before the Holy Spirit descended upon him at baptism we shall probably never know; but after that event he went forth upon his mission, quietly and completely conscious of the fact that he was the Son of God. He did not disclose this fact to his disciples. Instead he tried in every way to lead them to discover it for themselves; and when he tested them out at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16: 13-20) with the question, "Who do men say that I am?" and received from Peter the answer, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," his joy knew no bounds. The disciples, especially Peter, had truly opened their hearts and minds to the divine revelation. They had learned the great fact that Jesus was a divine personality. Later

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the people, and still later the Pharisees, seemed to realize that the whole significance of this man's life arose from the fact that he had a unique relationship to God; that he had come forth from God, and that his words and acts were the working out of a divine plan. The Pharisees, of course, did not admit this, but something—and we can believe today that it was an unconscious acknowledgment of his genuineness—drove them to fury when at his trial he calmly confessed that he was the Son of God.

The second paragraph of the Apostles' Creed has to do with the person of Christ. Who was this man who called forth such unqualified loyalty on the part of many of those who knew him, and who has been the source of new life during the past two thousand years? This earliest of all confessions of faith, known as the Apostles' Creed, is above everything else an attempt to describe and to declare the divine significance of Jesus the Christ.

Probably the best way to understand the declaration with which this chapter deals is to take up each statement separately. When we have done this, we will see that every word has a profound significance.

“I believe in Jesus . . .”

Jesus was his human name. It was, of course, his divine name too; for the angel had announced at the time of his birth that his name should be called Jesus, for he should save his people from their sins. The name

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Jesus in its Hebrew form was Joshua, Jehoshua, Hosea. It meant "Jehovah saves." The name, of course, had been borne, and very honorably, by others. There were many people in Jesus' day, no doubt, who bore the same name. His family called him Jesus; his friends and fellow townsmen addressed him by that familiar name. It was the seal of his humanity.

We never catch the significance of Jesus Christ until we know that he was at one and the same time perfectly human and completely divine. When we say that we believe in Jesus, that is equivalent to saying that we believe in his humanity; and no Christian creed would be sound that did not begin with a declaration of belief in the humanity of Jesus. The earliest heresy in the Church was not the attempt to rob Jesus of his divinity, but the attempt to rob him of his humanity. The Gnostics almost ruined the Christian enterprise at the very beginning by denying the humanity of Christ. There is nothing more precious in our faith than the realization that our Saviour was a human being, tempted in all points like as we are.

The incarnation was God coming into human flesh in earnest. There was no make-believe about it. God did not come down and assume the flesh as a cloak behind which he was perfectly protected from the temptations and troubles to which all flesh is heir. The incarnation is the first of a great series of redemptive facts. It means that when God chose to identify himself with humanity, he chose to do so in the most earnest

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and sincere manner possible. He became not partly human, but completely so. He laid himself open to every danger of temptation, and the crucifixion is the tragic witness of the fact that he laid himself open to every danger of the flesh. Jesus Christ was God incarnate, and Jesus Christ was a man. We can never understand him as God until we first understand him as man. We should never forget that the favorite title which he applied to himself was Son of Man.

Now to believe in Jesus and to believe in him as a complete human being is the first thing everyone must do who would be a disciple. A belief in the deity of Jesus without a belief in his humanity is spiritually sterile. From the very beginning the Church has contended for the complete humanity of Jesus as well as for his complete deity.

Men have not as a rule found it hard to believe in his humanity. The most cursory reading of the New Testament gives us the picture of a man who fits into the best of every age. There is challenge in his words, sanity and wholesomeness in his observation, good robust common sense in his teachings. Few men have arisen during the ages to dispute the teachings of Christ or to deny the greatness of his character. But no man is a Christian who acknowledges the human supremacy of Jesus and goes no further. While the belief in the humanity of Jesus is the beginning of all sound doctrine, this belief is not of itself enough. In the modern world untold millions of people can truthfully say that

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they believe in Jesus. They believe that he was the greatest man that ever lived, the wisest teacher, the most outstanding hero. All these things are true, but they are not a sufficient basis for faith. Gandhi believes these things, but is not a Christian. Many Mohammedans and Jews believe this, yet they would resent being called Christians. There are millions of people living in our own land who, because they believe these things about Jesus, consider themselves Christians; but they are no more Christians than Gandhi is a Christian, or some intelligent Moslem or Jew who pays to Jesus the full tribute of his admiration. We never get started in our Christian belief until we can truthfully say, "I believe in Jesus," but if that is all we can say, our faith is poor indeed.

We must go on to our next declaration of the Creed: "I believe in . . . Christ." The word Christ, as we have already observed, is a title. It means the Messiah, the anointed one of God. Not only the Jews but the Gentiles also, at the time of Christ's birth, were looking for the coming of a great deliverer. This was a world-wide hope. Most of the Jews interpreted the promise of a Messiah to mean that a strong son of David, supported by unusual supernatural powers, would arise to rescue the Jew from the Roman and make him the ruler of all the world. Only a few understood the spiritual significance of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus had long pondered the prophets, and he knew full well that God's Messiah would not be a military figure, but a

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spiritual saviour. Even among the disciples the spiritual significance of the Messiah was not at first entirely understood.

The first preachers went out to proclaim to the world that this Jesus, whom his generation had regarded as a man, was not only a man but more than a man. He was the long-expected Messiah who had been sent to the world by God to proclaim the message of salvation and to give men power to achieve salvation. It was the fact that Peter clearly recognized Jesus as the Christ that caused the Master to cry out in exultation, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father which is in heaven." The early disciples had just one message—this Jesus who was crucified is the long-expected Messiah. Stephen suffered martyrdom because his mouth could not be stopped against the proclamation of this belief. The Epistles of Paul maintain with an unbroken consistency that in Jesus of Nazareth we have not just a man touched by the Spirit of God, but God Himself bringing salvation to sinful man in the person of his Son.

In the year 325 A.D., the Church declared at the Council of Nicea that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and of one substance with the Father. The elderly Arius maintained that Christ was of a different substance from that of the Father. The young Athanasius, not yet thirty years of age, maintained that Christ was of the same substance with the Father. It may seem to us today that this was a little thing to fight over. But

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if Arius had won the day, the Church of Jesus Christ would have died just as surely as two centuries before it would have died had Marcion and the Gnostics won the day. The victory at Nicea meant that the Church was to go forth in the strength of the conviction that Jesus Christ is the divine Messiah, very God of very God, of one substance with the Father, "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven."

We never understand the Saviour of the world if we understand him only as Christ. We must understand him as Jesus the Christ; that is, as God incarnate in human flesh, yet retaining in this state all the power and significance of the divine. The statement "I believe in Jesus Christ" is a statement of belief in the complete humanity and the complete deity of our Lord.

The rest of the paragraph dealing with Jesus is an explanation of who Jesus Christ is. We shall examine in the remainder of this chapter the meaning of two very revealing statements concerning him.

First, he is God's only Son. People very often want to strike out that word "only." They are willing to admit that Jesus Christ was superior to anyone who has ever lived, but they are not willing to admit that he was essentially different from anyone who has ever lived. This point of view is generally expressed by saying that the difference between ourselves and Jesus Christ is a difference in degree, but not in substance. We are sons of God; the New Testament says so.

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(1 John 3: 2.) Is it not much more logical, and in fact more noble, to believe that Jesus Christ is like us, only better to an inconceivable degree than anyone who has ever lived?

But the New Testament insists that while in certain respects he is like us, in certain other very essential respects he was different from us. It is true that we are the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be. But Jesus was God's only begotten Son. He was the beloved Son, in whom God was well pleased. We may take comfort from the fact that Jesus was like us, but our salvation primarily depends upon the fact that he was different from us. He was able to do for mankind what no merely human being could ever do. His superiority did not consist just in the fact that his moral achievements were greater than those of anyone who had ever lived; it was due to the fact that from the beginning Jesus Christ had been different from all other creatures—greater than the angels, and greater than man. When God brought about the incarnation, He did not pick out some great human soul through whom He might manifest himself; He put his divine plan into operation through one who bore a different relationship to Him from that of any other being in the universe.

What the full significance of that term, "the only begotten Son," may be, we will probably never know, and certainly not on this side of the grave; but that Jesus Christ had a unique relationship with God and

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that our salvation depends upon our faith in that unique relationship, the New Testament unremittingly insists. In speaking to the disciples Christ never said *our* Father; He always said either *my* Father or *your* Father. It is true that the prayer he taught his disciples begins, "Our Father"; but this was a prayer for his disciples to use. There is no indication that he himself used this prayer. When he spoke of the Father he always said, "My Father." Close as was the fellowship he had with his disciples, Jesus recognized the fact that there existed between God and himself a relationship no man had the right to claim. It was because he claimed to be equal with God that he was arrested and condemned to death, and what made Caiaphas rend his robes in horror was the fact that this rustic from Nazareth claimed to be the Son of God.

Men may admire Jesus and praise him highly without any conviction whatsoever that he was different from the rest of his brethren, save in degree; but to worship Jesus men have to believe that there was a difference between him and all humanity which the words, "the only begotten Son," describe. The New Testament teaches that there is no salvation without faith in Jesus Christ, and the Jesus Christ with whom the New Testament deals was the *only* begotten Son of God, the Word made flesh, the One who was in the beginning with God and was God.

The last statement the Creed makes about the person

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of Christ is that he is our Lord. "I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord."

The words "Jesus," "Christ," "His only begotten Son," all have to do with the nature of Jesus. They describe the incarnation. They tell us who this being is that in the providence of God identified himself with mankind for the purpose of redemption. The statement, however, that he is our Lord has to do with our relationship with this divine Saviour. If the Creed had simply said, "I believe . . . in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son," the question might well be asked, "Granted that this is the divine Son of God, what is to be our relationship to him?" The Creed deals with this briefly and effectively. It says that this Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, is our Lord.

The Greek word meaning "Lord" is the same word that in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament is used for Jehovah. On its spiritual side, therefore, the statement that Christ is our Lord means that he is equal with God. But this is simply a repetition of what has already been said about the nature of Christ. The new element introduced by the statement that Christ is our Lord is the ethical element. It is a declaration dealing not so much with the nature of Christ as with the relationship he bears to his disciples and his disciples to him. This Jesus Christ is to be regarded by Christian believers as the Lord of their life. The gospel is ethically sound. Although it abounds in great spiritual mysteries it never fails to press the ethical requirements of belief

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into the very forefront of our consideration. It is not enough that we believe certain things about Christ; the next and equally important question is, "What are you going to do about it?" How is this divine Jesus related to the living of your life? Soundness of belief is a matter of grave importance to every disciple of Jesus Christ, but equally important is soundness of conduct. Christianity is in most striking contrast with non-Christian religions because it never to the slightest degree allows the spiritual to be divorced from the ethical.

There is no more important statement in the entire Creed than this statement that Jesus Christ must be the Lord of the believer's life. Jesus declared that men are to be judged by their fruits, and his most terrible denunciation was pronounced against those who with their lips acknowledged him as Lord and in their lives denied him. If Jesus, the divine Son of God, had come into the life of man and succumbed to temptation, men could never have devoted their lives to him, no matter how divine his origin. It was the fact that this only begotten Son of God, made susceptible to all temptations by the incarnation, rose above them in moral triumph that causes him to be the object of our worship. Just as robust faith requires a perfect balance between our belief in Jesus as man and our belief in Jesus as God, so does Christian living require us to maintain a perfect balance between the spiritual aspects of our faith and the ethical.

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On its spiritual side Christianity is the religion of forgiveness; on its ethical side Christianity is an attempt to put the law of love into operation amid human relationships. In order to do this we must acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every aspect of our lives. He is Lord not only in the spiritual sense that he is one with the Father, but also in the ethical sense that we are accountable to him in every thought we entertain and in every act we perform. We are to think of Jesus Christ not just as one who died, rose again, ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, but as the ever-living Lord to whom our allegiance is due not only in matters of faith, but also in matters of conduct.

Nothing is so destructive to the effectiveness of the Christian life as to allow a chasm to open up between belief and behavior. Some of the most dastardly crimes ever committed have been committed by men who believed all the essentials of Christian doctrine, but failed in a tragic way to appreciate its relation to daily life. Jesus was crucified by devoutly religious men. The inquisition was conceived and perpetrated in the name of God by men the great majority of whom very earnestly believed in God, in Jesus Christ the Saviour, and in the reality of the Holy Spirit. It has been most disconcerting to many readers of the New Testament to observe that Jesus spent little time in denouncing adulterers, drunkards, and thieves; but the 23d and 25th chapters of the Gospel of Matthew are examples of how

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furiously his wrath could burn when he saw men of right belief living unrighteous lives.

In this modern day let us repeat the Creed with the consciousness that it is a fit instrument for the expression of men's faith in every age, but let us realize as we repeat these sacred declarations that faith without works is dead. The chapters of this book are based upon the thesis that strong conviction is the greatest need of the modern Church. But strong conviction without righteous life is the abomination which God appears most sternly to condemn. It will do us but little good to confess Christ in the sanctuary if we cannot confess him on the street; to praise him in the hallowed precincts of worship if we cannot glorify his name in the way we conduct our business. If we cannot carry him into our hours of leisure, of what avail is it that we should think lovingly of him in seasons of meditation? If Christ is not the Lord of life, he is not the Lord of heaven; but if once we catch the glorious vision of him as Lord of heaven, how can we deny him the full devotion of our lives? The glory of the Christian life is that it carries in perfect balance a faith in the unseen too glorious for human lips to express and a devotion to righteousness that remains steadfast even in the face of death.

To believe in Jesus is to believe in the complete humanity of our Saviour. To believe in Christ is to believe in his complete deity. The statement that he is God's only begotten Son deals with mysterious origins of his person which transcend both the limits of time

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and human comprehension. But the simple statement that he is our Lord comes down into the daily pathways of our lives and fills us with the glad realization that it is our privilege not only to worship Christ but to serve him.

## V

### "WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY GHOST, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY"

ONE of the most controversial doctrines in the modern church is that of the Virgin Birth.

It should be admitted frankly at the beginning of any discussion of this subject that the Virgin Birth is not a circumstance that can be proved by reason or argument. Neither can it be fully understood. It is one of God's great mysteries. If it is to be accepted at all, it must be accepted on faith. But like every spiritual truth which finds daily utility in our lives, there appear to be well-grounded reasons for believing that the gospel contention that Christ was born of a virgin is a fact. This chapter will be devoted to an examination of the evidence. Such an examination is not an attempt to prove the Virgin Birth by reason, for, as we have already observed, this cannot be done. We shall examine our evidence for the purpose of finding out whether or not a Biblical declaration—which, if we accept it at all, we must accept on faith—seems also to have the support of credible testimony.

As we begin an examination of this subject, one thing more should be said. About this doctrine in recent years there has raged a very heated controversy. Controversy

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is always unbecoming, and nowhere so much as in matters of religion. The frank presentation of arguments in support of any spiritual truth need not, however, be controversial; and in what follows the writer would plead for a recognition of this fact.

A question with which the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is often challenged is this: "Does it really make any difference? If one believes in the deity and sinlessness of Jesus Christ, what does it matter whether he was born of a virgin, or born as the rest of us were born?"

There are three things to be said to such a query:

*First, a denial of the Virgin Birth calls into question the integrity and authority of Scripture.* If the two stories of the birth of Christ related in Matthew and Luke are not true, the veracity of these Gospels is impugned. It does no good to maintain that we believe in the essential honesty of these writers, but that they were misinformed or were under the spell of certain false notions which characterized their age. The fact remains that if they were so far afield in the first stories related in their Gospels, the confidence of their readers has been very seriously damaged with reference to whatever else they wrote.

*In the second place, a denial of this miracle usually arises from or leads to a denial of miracle in general.* We have already observed that the modern eagerness to get the miraculous element out of religion is one reason why religion appears to be losing its influence in

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men's lives. If a miracle as closely related to the person of Christ as is the miracle of the Virgin Birth cannot be accepted, it is easy to see how other miracles cannot be accepted; and when once a man has started the process of casting the miraculous out of his faith, he soon has little faith left. He has dropped revealed religion and adopted rationalism.

In the third place, *the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is so intimately related to the doctrine of the Incarnation that to deny the former or term it unessential may, and very often does, prevent one from understanding and appreciating the latter.* Since more will be said about this toward the close of the chapter, a detailed discussion will be reserved until that time.

Let us begin our examination of this statement of the Creed concerning the birth of Christ with the realization that we are dealing with a matter which has a very direct bearing upon our faith. It does make a difference what we believe about it. Many sincere people, willing to accept almost anything else in the system of Christian doctrine, find it difficult and frequently impossible to accept this. They encounter all sorts of difficulties. Since these difficulties are very real and have been recognized by even the most devout scholars of the Church, it will be well for us to examine them briefly before trying to make plain to ourselves what the Fathers had in mind when they incorporated in the Creed the declaration that Christ was born of a virgin.

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The Virgin Birth appears to many to be *a perfectly unbelievable miracle*. How could such a thing have happened? There is no counterpart of it in ordinary life. Is it not overtaxing the natural capacity for faith to ask men and women to believe that Christ did not come into life by the processes of ordinary generation, but as the result of a stupendous and unheard-of miracle?

The simplest answer to such an anxious query is that the Virgin Birth is certainly not any harder to believe than any other miracle. In fact, it is not so hard to believe as is the resurrection. Such an amazing occurrence as a return from death is a circumstance unheard-of outside the Bible. But we are all familiar with the phenomenon of birth. What we often fail to appreciate is that birth as we know it is a mysterious and thoroughly remarkable occurrence. That the coming together of two cells, microscopic in size, should produce a human being, and that these cells should contain all the mental, physical, and moral characteristics which go to make up the living man, is a miracle the stupendous character of which we fail to appreciate only because the occurrence is commonplace. We have no idea how our own lives were brought into being. Physicians can explain many factors in the process, but after they have exhausted their fund of knowledge, the essentials of the whole matter remain unexplained.

Now the Virgin Birth is only the heightening of a process already miraculous in character. The resurrec-

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tion, on the other hand, is not the extension of something with which we are already familiar. It is something the like of which we never encounter in ordinary life. The instantaneous healing of leprosy and other disorders recorded in the ministry of Jesus is also a phenomenon with which we are unfamiliar. But the Virgin Birth is an occurrence with which to a considerable extent we are all familiar—namely, birth, which in this instance assumed a miraculous character because for the mystery of the fertilization of the female cell by the tiny male cell is substituted the fertilization of the female cell under the direct power of God. Certainly, if we accord God any power at all, this is not an unbelievable occurrence. Furthermore, when once we realize the mystery of ordinary birth, and realize further that in the birth of Christ we are dealing with what has since proved to be the outstanding event in history, is it asking too much of the faith of any man to ask him to believe that in this outstanding event the direct action of God's power was brought into the situation in such a way that an essentially mysterious process was raised up to the height which men call miracle?

If we think about it for a while we readily see that the Virgin Birth is certainly not any harder to believe than are many other miracles recorded in the New Testament; and is in fact easier to believe than some, because it involves only the adding of a miraculous element to a situation with which, in all other respects, we are familiar.

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Another reason often advanced for doubting the validity of the Virgin Birth is that the accounts are found in only two of the Gospels. Neither Mark nor John mentions them, nor does Paul make explicit reference to the Virgin Birth in any of his thirteen epistles. If it really occurred and if faith in the event is a really important matter, why were Mark, John, and Paul silent about it?

The first thing to be faced is that it *does* occur in two Gospels. The only Gospels which have anything at all to say about the birth of Christ affirm in unmistakable language that Christ was born of a virgin. Mark's Gospel deals with the ministry of Jesus and definitely starts with the baptism. It is not as if Mark had dealt with the early years of Jesus' life and had either denied the Virgin Birth or made no mention of it. The birth and early years of Jesus' life were matters which did not come within the scope of his narrative.

The same is true of the Evangelist John. He seems to have been interested in giving us a picture of the only begotten Son of God, and he shows less interest than do the other evangelists in the events of Jesus' life. But there is more to be said about this matter. John wrote his Gospel a considerable time after both Matthew and Luke had written theirs. He was probably familiar with both these Gospels. Had they misstated anything about the birth of Jesus, we cannot imagine that John would have allowed such a statement to go unchallenged. One of the first persons to question

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the story of the miraculous birth of Christ was a certain Gnostic named Cerinthus. Irenaeus tells a story on the authority of Polycarp, a close friend of John's, that John one day fled from a bathhouse in horror when he perceived Cerinthus within. He abhorred the man because of his false teachings; and it is not inconceivable that the attitude Cerinthus took toward the Virgin Birth was one of the things which caused John to regard him as he did.

John did not mention the temptation of Jesus, nor—most amazing of all—the institution of the Lord's Supper. Are we to conclude that these things did not occur because John did not mention them? The Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer are found in only two Gospels. Certainly we would not require that everything be affirmed by all four evangelists before we accept it.

As for Paul, the fact that he did not mention the Virgin Birth is not surprising. He mentioned few events in Jesus' life. He was interested not so much in the earthly Jesus as in the divine and risen Lord. We should never forget, however, that Luke was Paul's traveling companion for a number of years, probably while he was gathering the material for his life of Christ and the Acts of the Apostles. Is it not reasonable to suppose that Paul and Luke often discussed the events of Jesus' life; and, if such was the case, can one imagine that Luke would have begun his Gospel with the account of an

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event about which Paul knew nothing, or which he perhaps denied?

The argument from silence in Paul's case proves nothing; and the same can be said of the fact that the event is not recorded in either the Gospel of Mark or that of John. The point is that it *is* recorded in two of the Gospels, that scholars are almost unanimous in their contention that the birth stories were part of the original narratives, and that some go so far as to maintain that the substance of these chapters is older than anything else in the New Testament.

What about the contention so often made that birth by a virgin was a common way of accounting for greatness in the ancient world and hence probably a myth also in its occurrence in the Bible?

It has been said that Plato was born of a virgin. But the story by Diogenes Laertius in which the account of Plato's birth occurs does not claim this. Was Alexander the Great supposed to have been born of a virgin? In order to ascribe to himself divine origin, he had the priests give out the story—which he himself tried assiduously to spread abroad—that he was not the bodily son of Philip, but “was begotten by a serpent cohabiting with his mother.” Also we are told that Augustus “was careful that the fable should be widely diffused to the effect that his mother was once, while asleep in the temple, visited by the god in the form of a serpent, and that in the tenth month afterwards he himself was born.” How about Buddha? The story is told that

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while his mother (a married woman) was asleep, she dreamed that a white six-tusked elephant entered her side and that later a child was born. How about the Greek heroes born from the union of some god with a mortal? The accounts simply state that such births were the result of affairs which certain of the gods were supposed to have had with earthly damsels who met their fancy.<sup>1</sup>

Now listen to the story of the virgin birth of our Lord as told by Luke: "And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. . . . Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. . . . And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her." (Luke 1: 28-35, 38.)

When we compare this restrained and exquisitely

<sup>1</sup> Orr, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, Lecture VI. Scribners.

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chaste account with the gross fables mentioned earlier, the conclusion seems inevitable that the Virgin Birth, as it is woven into the very texture of the New Testament, is an entirely different thing from the childish and fanciful tales of Greek and Oriental mythology.

Probably the most mystifying thing about the Virgin Birth stories is the genealogies. Two very disconcerting facts rise up to shake the faith of even the most devout. The first is that the genealogies in the two Gospels are strikingly different; and the second is that they claim to prove that Jesus was descended from David and do this by tracing the descent not through his mother, but through *his father*. What could the Gospel writers have meant by introducing such confusing material into their narratives?

The most learned scholars have wrestled with this mystery and have drawn certain conclusions that mean much to those who know the ancient tongues and are familiar with ancient customs. But the writer feels that the simplest and best way to face this problem is to face it and to confess that here is something which we, two thousand years from the time the genealogies were written, are as yet not in a position to understand.

Some explain it by saying that one of the genealogies is Mary's and the other Joseph's, but among the finest scholars there is profound disagreement on this point. We must remember that the men who wrote down the stories of the Virgin Birth, and then put alongside them

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two genealogies that confuse our minds instead of clarifying them, were careful historians. They wrote for a Church in which there were undoubtedly thousands of persons who had known the Apostles and some who had actually known Jesus. If we add to this the fact that John, the author of the Fourth Gospel, was probably still alive and can be assumed to have known, eventually at least, about these narratives and the appended genealogies, we begin to realize that what is dreadfully mystifying to us was probably not in the least mystifying to them. The evangelists were not fools. Luke has the distinction of having produced the most accurate historical document that has come down from antiquity. Would he have been guilty of laying beside his appealing story of the Virgin Birth a genealogy of Joseph that would have confused his readers?

Evidently the genealogies were not confusing to the people who first read them, *because they possessed certain knowledge about genealogical matters which we at the present time do not possess*. Even Cerinthus and the Ebionites—the only deniers of the Virgin Birth during the first two Christian centuries—do not mention the genealogies as a reason for their denial.

But if all that could be said in favor of the Virgin Birth was what has been said so far in this chapter, it would add little to the enrichment of our Christian faith. We have considered the reasons for not denying it. Are there any reasons why we should affirm it; and

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if so, will these reasons deepen our faith in the living God and his power over our hearts?

That this is true the writer feels quite convinced; and in making this statement he is expressing not alone a personal opinion, but the overwhelming confidence of the Christian Church in all its branches. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth is an essential doctrine; and when once a believer has laid hold on its real meaning, he invariably experiences an appreciation of the saving work of Christ which is impossible under other circumstances.

What are the reasons for accepting the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Christ?

The first is, that these stories, found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, are integral parts of documents which are historically well attested. Mention has already been made of the statement by one great scholar that the substance of the birth stories in Luke are older than anything else in the New Testament. We are also told that these stories appear to be the translation of an Aramaic narrative or manuscript. We know that Luke was in Jerusalem with Paul, and that he came in contact with many of the early leaders of the Church. His gospel has sometimes been called "the woman's gospel" because of his frequent and detailed references to certain women who followed Jesus and his disciples during his ministry. Was it from one of these he first heard the story? Naturally this was not the kind of story that would be bruited about by the one person

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who could possibly know all the facts—namely, the mother of our Lord. But it is conceivable that she confided them to some understanding woman who was very close to her and had been close to her dear son. Some think this woman was Joanna, wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. Others think that it was during the time Luke and Paul sojourned in the home of Philip the Evangelist that he heard this story of the miraculous birth from the lips of Philip's four virgin daughters. There is an interesting reference in the Acts to "an old disciple," Mnason, with whom Paul and Luke lodged. (Acts 21: 16.) He, no doubt, had many interesting things to tell this eager young Gentile physician who was collecting material for a life of Jesus. Did he tell him about the Virgin Birth?

Add to all these things the fact that Luke is almost universally regarded not only as a remarkable man of letters, but also as one of the most accurate historians of antiquity, and we can appreciate fully the contention often made that he would never have allowed such a story to have become part of his Gospel had he not been absolutely sure that it was true. In his prologue he tells his friend Theophilus that he got his material from those who had been eyewitnesses from the beginning and ministers of the word; and the four verses which comprise this famous bit of writing give us the picture of a historian who diligently scrutinized every particle of his historical material before he committed a syllable of it to writing.

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This man would surely not have been guilty of beginning an amazingly accurate historical document with a story about the truth of which he was not absolutely convinced.

To all this must be added the testimony of the early Church. The Virgin Birth was denied only by the Gnostic Cerinthus and the sect known as the Ebionites—Jewish Christians who tried also to keep all the ceremonial requirements of the Law. When the second century opened, the widespread belief that Jesus had been miraculously born of the Virgin Mary was apparently accepted by many who—because their memories went back to the middle of the first century, or even earlier—would have had the right to challenge it had the tradition been unwarranted, and was considered an essential doctrine because of its fundamental relationship with the doctrine of the Incarnation.

This brings us to the crux of the whole matter. The value of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth lies in the fact that, when spiritually apprehended, it deepens immeasurably our understanding of the significance of Christ's person. We believe he was God in the flesh. The Virgin Birth tells us how this great redemptive occurrence took place. God might have sent "the second Adam" into the world as he did "the first Adam," a full-grown adult. But He did not choose so to do. He chose for his purpose the familiar fact of birth when He decided that the Word was to become flesh. He went the full length in humility and allowed the

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Son to go to the uttermost in assuming the weakness of the flesh. He caused Christ to be born in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, that he might condemn sin in the flesh.

But this Christ was himself no sinner. He had all the capacities for sin, and keenly felt its tempting influence many times; but scarcely anyone who has ever read the New Testament denies the fact that he resisted these advances perfectly and came to the end of his life the only sinless being the race has produced. This was a transcendent, spiritual triumph which the grace of God and the will of Christ himself made possible; but that he might be prepared to be the sin-bearer of the race, God sent him into the world free of those sinful dispositions which all men bring into the world with them because they are part of the human stock, and which theologians have taught us to call "original sin." This unheard-of miracle of a sinless being God apparently achieved through the unheard-of miracle of a sanctified virgin birth. He took a pure and perfectly consecrated young woman—one who said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word"—and under the overshadowing power of the Holy Spirit produced in her "that holy thing" which the world in gladness has acclaimed "the Son of God."

The Incarnation is the greatest event in history. Would it not be reasonable to suppose that if God ever performed a miracle He would do so in connection with this stupendous event? Also bear in mind that all

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through the second section of the Creed, the balance between the complete humanity and the complete deity of Christ is scrupulously maintained. Mary was the mother of his human nature; God was the Father of his divine nature. It was fitting that this only begotten Son who maintained a unique relationship with God through all time should have had as his Father the One to whom he was uniquely related, and not a human father, exceptional though such a father might have been. The doctrine of the Virgin Birth is the affirmation of this great fact of faith: that when in his providence God brought the Incarnation to pass, He did so not only through the instrumentality of consecrated flesh, but by bringing his power to bear in a *direct* and *supernatural* manner upon that flesh.

It was done after this manner, not, as many believe, because God considers the ordinary mode of human generation unclean. As the union of man and woman is the established means by which new humanity is brought into being, it is unthinkable that the Almighty who established this process should reject it as a means of bringing about the incarnation of his Son because He considered it unclean. The least reflection on this matter leads us to the conclusion that male parenthood was in this case put aside, not because there is anything unworthy about the union of the sexes, but because conception under the power of the Holy Spirit *preserved the most direct connection possible between the Heavenly Father and the incarnate Son.*

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The Virgin Birth is the divine certification of the fact that our salvation goes back *directly* to God. This Saviour of the world came from God, is God, and regardless of what other agencies and factors may have been employed in bringing the Incarnation to pass, this the birth stories assure us: that the actual clothing of the Word with flesh involved no break either between the Father and the Only Begotten Son, or between the Heavenly Father who saves, and his sinful children who need salvation. Our salvation is of God because our Saviour is of God; and that delicate link which connects flesh and spirit (so mystifying in its nature that we shall probably never understand its significance until we learn of these things in the eternity of God) was in this instance, when the salvation of mankind was at stake, accomplished by the direct action of supernatural power on the consecrated human nature of the Virgin Mary.

If believing Christians who find it hard to accept the Virgin Birth would take the first step toward an understanding of its meaning by accepting on the authority of the Word of God this doctrine which they cannot compass by reason, they would experience a deepening of their faith which would amaze them. The direct entrance of God into human life, which is the heart of the Incarnation, would become more clear to them and more precious as a sustaining religious conviction. Not without reason has the Church contended for the ac-

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ceptance of this doctrine by Christian believers. It is a doctrine which goes to the very heart of religious reality. Push it impatiently aside and you will never know the full glory of the Incarnation; accept it, and out of his priceless treasures of wisdom and knowledge God will reward your venture of faith.

And no discussion of the Virgin Birth should close without calling attention to the fact that the doctrine has a profound ethical significance. *It dramatizes, in a simple and appealing fashion, the triumph of spirit over flesh.* It is not the will of our Heavenly Father that the flesh shall triumph. Irresistibly the Most High God is bringing about the triumph of spirit over flesh, and He is doing this by the saving power of a Person in whom spirit and flesh were united in perfect holiness.

The Virgin Birth teaches this lesson especially with reference to sex. That holy function which man has so often degraded, God employed to effect the Incarnation. By so doing He not only showed the divine significance of what man so often degrades, but gave him the assurance of his blessing and support as, in the toils of temptation, he strives to emulate in his little human way the triumph of spirit over flesh which God, in his glorious divine way, achieved in the Virgin Birth.

When in simple faith men accept the Virgin Birth as one of God's great mysteries, then do they come to know the meaning of the promise of the Master,

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“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”  
(Matt. 5: 8.)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For further study of the Virgin Birth, see *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, by Orr (Scribners); *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, by Machen (Harpers); *Things Most Surely Believed*, Ch. III, by Macartney (Cokesbury Press).

## VI

### "SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED, DEAD, AND BURIED"

PONTIUS PILATE! What an unenviable immortality he achieved!

Both Josephus, the Jewish historian, and Tacitus, the Roman historian, mention him. He appears to have been a cruel, violent, and according to the scriptural description of him, a morally weak and vacillating man. Much as he might try to wash his hands of the legal murder of Jesus, the world has consistently refused to hold him guiltless. While Pilate's name was put into the Creed in order that the Crucifixion might be accurately dated, rather than for the purpose of holding Pilate himself up to scorn, still history has determined to regard him with the contempt that a moral weakling always deserves.

The statement of the Creed which we are now considering gives us an account of the earthly life of Jesus. Note the graphic nature of the terms "suffered . . . was crucified, dead, and buried." Thus does the Creed describe the earthly existence of Jesus without saying a word about his teachings, his miracles, or the influence of his personality on his associates. Why? Because the death of Christ loomed up as the matter of primary

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importance in the minds of the early disciples. One-fifth of the Gospel of Matthew deals with the death of Christ, two-thirds of the Gospel of Mark, one-quarter of the Gospel of Luke, and one-half of the Gospel of John. Undoubtedly the disciples attached to the death of Jesus the most profound significance.

Jesus spoke to a generation which expected the coming of a Messiah. The enthusiasm with which both his preaching and that of John the Baptist were received indicates how ardently the people were looking for the coming of The Promised One of God. But their conception of this Messiah was vastly different from that of Jesus. He accused the Scribes and Pharisees of his day of being ignorant of the true meaning of Scripture. They emphasized the fact that the coming of the Messiah would be attended with great glory, but they had a purely materialistic idea of the nature of this glory. If they had read the Scriptures with discernment, they would have seen that the prophets foretold the coming of a Messiah whose glory would be associated with suffering. The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah especially made this clear.

The Scribes and Pharisees were what we call today "wishful thinkers." They created in their minds the image of a Messiah they would like to have, instead of an image of the Messiah God had promised. Jesus, as he pondered the Scriptures, made no such mistake. He saw that it behooved the Christ to suffer that he might enter into his glory. One of the reasons the Jewish offi-

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cials, and finally the populace, cried out against him with such hatred was that he so bitterly disappointed their hopes of what a Messiah should be. They were looking for a glorious king. The man who claimed to be the Messiah stood convicted of blasphemy and later was put to death by a means that the law called accursed.

The sufferings of Christ were very real. When the Creed declares that he suffered under Pontius Pilate, it is using the terms of the utmost realism. As Studdert Kennedy has said, "There stands Perfect Man with the spittal of a drunken soldier streaming down his face, a crown of thorns set sideways on his head, with blood from the great wounds in his back sousing red through the dirty purple cloth that mockery has thrown across his nakedness—there stands Christ."<sup>1</sup> We should never repeat this statement of the Creed without allowing the realization to sink deep into our hearts that the Son of Man suffered in a very real and terrible fashion. The Church spurned the suggestion of the ancient Gnostics that this suffering of Christ was only in appearance. It was real—desperately real. Furthermore, it was the culmination of a life of suffering. There is a sense in which Jesus was the happiest man that ever lived. His relationship with God was perfect. But because he knew human life perfectly and could perfectly appreciate how far it fell short of the will and purpose of God, he suffered in a way that no ordinary man has

<sup>1</sup> *I Believe*, p. 186. Doran.

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ever suffered. An Old Testament writer had said that when the Messiah came he would be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53: 3). And after the resurrection had vindicated their hopes in him, the disciples read this ancient prophecy and saw it perfectly fulfilled in the person and life of our Lord.

It has sometimes been claimed that the disciples, as they went forth to proclaim their new message to the world, laid an undue emphasis on the suffering and death of Jesus. But the most superficial reading of the Gospels reveals the fact that Jesus regarded his death not as a great unmerited tragedy, but as the consummation of his life according to the purposes of God. He seemed to know from the beginning that the path upon which he must walk would lead him through agony and eventually to death. He said that he was straitened until his baptism of suffering should be accomplished. He declared that he had come to give his life a ransom for many; that as the good shepherd he would lay down his life for the sheep. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must he be lifted up. He indicated that his death was in accordance with the deliberate council and foreknowledge of his Father.

He allowed no sword to be drawn in his defense. He refused to call upon legions of angels to deliver him out of the hands of his enemies. "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." (Isa. 53: 7.)

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Almost the last thing he did in his ministry was to institute the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, enjoining his disciples to break the bread and drink the cup in remembrance of him and his sacrifice. The institution of this sacrament seems to have been his last anxious and carefully planned provision that whatever else men would forget about him, they should not forget his sacrifice on the cross.

One might suppose that the degradation of their Lord and Master would be hidden or at least left unemphasized by their disciples, when they went forth to proclaim the gospel. It is amazing that they make the cross the central theme of their preaching. Paul tells the Corinthians that he came to them determined to know nothing among them "save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2: 2). To the Jews this was a stumbling block, and to the Greek, foolishness. But to them that had received the divine spirit of discernment, the cross was "the power of God and wisdom of God." The cross was God's foolishness, but a foolishness wiser than man's wisdom. It was the weakness of God, but a weakness stronger than the utmost of human power. For the wisdom of God lies in his humility. Neither Jew nor Greek could see this, nor is it any plainer to unspiritual men of the twentieth century than it was to the unspiritually minded of the first century.

The incarnation was the greatest event in human history because it meant the identification of God with the life of humanity. This coming down of the Most High

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into human flesh, taking upon himself the weaknesses of the flesh and enduring the contradictions of sinful men, constituted, as true humility always does, a stupendous spiritual triumph. Men would naturally believe that the way God could best win men into the doing of his will would be by some dazzling manifestation of his glory; but the wisdom of God knew better. The hardest lesson a Christian disciple has to learn is that the very highest in wisdom for both God and man abides in humility. St. Paul also saw that the cross was a demonstration of the fact that the greatest power in the universe is love. The Incarnation had demonstrated the humility of God; and therefore his wisdom, and the culmination of the Incarnation—namely, the crucifixion—both showed forth and constituted the power of God. Man, untouched by revelation, would naturally assume that the power of God was most perfectly manifested in some stupendous, arbitrary act. But the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, by the perfect showing forth of God's love for mankind, demonstrated at the same time that in God's universe power is not arbitrary force, but love.

So Paul went forth, and his fellow disciples, not hiding the fact of the cross, but making it central in the proclamation of the gospel. Man was redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. 1: 19). God had made him who knew no sin to be sin in our behalf, "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor.

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5: 21). John declared, "Herein is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4: 10).

Thus did the disciples emphasize the death of Christ as the factor of primary importance, and that in spite of the fact that the non-Chritsian Jews scorned the idea of a crucified Messiah, and the cultured Greeks derided it. There is not the slightest deviation in their united testimony that Christ's death was by the deliberate council and foreknowledge of God and with Christ's full and free assent. He had come into the world to achieve a redemptive purpose, and his death on the cross was the culminating act of that achievement.

The Jewish mind had been prepared for this idea of a divine-human sacrifice by the agelong practices of their religion. The first five books of the Old Testament are called the Books of the Law, and for the most part this Law consists of minute directions for the offering of sacrifice. In practically every primitive religion the world over the idea of offering sacrifice as a propitiation to the Divine Being or beings is a central tenet of faith. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of these things as the shadow of which Christ is the body and pattern.

For centuries the Jews had been trained in the idea that the forgiveness of sin is brought about by sacrifice, though we should not fancy that man first conceived this idea and God later used it and brought it to perfection in the sacrifice of Christ. The most routine and

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mechanical practices under the old dispensation appear to have been God's method for leading men to see that there can be no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. For centuries it was the shedding of animal blood, but always the blood shed was that of an innocent victim. So the spiritually discerning got it well established in their minds that the forgiveness of sins is brought about *only through sacrifice*, and that this sacrifice must always be that of *an innocent victim*.

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, known in theological parlance as the Atonement, must always stand at the center of Christian faith. God begins his contact with man by revelation; He continues it in the Incarnation; He brings it to a redemptive culmination in the Atonement. When Paul, writing to the Corinthians, defines the gospel as it had been delivered unto him, he makes no mention whatsoever of any of Christ's teachings, but recites a series of events which he undoubtedly expects us to consider the gospel, and the first of these events is, "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15: 3). We are assured that in his ministry Christ performed a three-fold office—that of prophet, priest, and king. In the office of prophet he revealed the will of God. This is Christ the teacher. In the office of priest he offered himself a sacrifice without spot to God, that he might reconcile the Heavenly Father and his earthly children whose relationship had been broken by sin. This is Christ the Suffering Servant and the Crucified One.

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Christ further executed the office of king in establishing a new humanity, bestowing grace upon the members thereof and rewarding, correcting, preserving, and supporting them amid the trials and temptations of life.

The doctrine of the Atonement deals with Christ executing the office of priest. It cannot be overemphasized that it is the failure to appreciate this aspect of Christ's work which accounts for much of the appalling loss of spiritual power in the modern Church. Christ as teacher—or as the older theologians express it, executing the office of prophet—was never more widely appreciated than he is today. Christ as the head of a new humanity waging a relentless war on evil and filling us with the hope of better things to come, is also known and genuinely appreciated in the modern world. Even non-Christians acknowledged Christ the teacher and Christ the leader of a new humanity. But Christ executing the office of a priest, carrying out the idea that the blood of an innocent victim is necessary for the remission of sins, and through the Eternal Spirit offering himself without spot to God that we "might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9: 15)—this conception of Christ does not have the vital hold upon the modern mind that it had upon the heart and mind of our forebears.

A century ago, and most of the centuries previous to that time, men were emphasizing the Atonement to the exclusion of everything else. With profound allegiance to him who died for our sins, men in previous

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generations sometimes maintained an inconceivable indifference to other simple teachings of the gospel. We have come to a time when Christ the teacher, Christ the head of a new humanity, is appreciated as he has not been appreciated since the days of the Apostles; but with this very intelligent appreciation of Christ as prophet and king, the modern church must come to an equally acute realization that the work of Christ is not twofold, but threefold, and that Christ executing the office of priest is equally important with Christ executing the offices of prophet and king.

We never understand the Atonement until we realize that it is the manifestation of God's love. It is the crowning act of a long series of acts which assure us that God loves us. One verse has become precious to believing Christians because it so perfectly connects the love of God and the Atonement in the declaration that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3: 16). The Atonement has often been represented as the offering up of a propitiation to appease an angry God. Nothing could be further from the truth. It was not to appease God's anger, but to fulfil God's love, that Christ suffered on the cross. All objections to the Atonement which arise from the contention that it is unthinkably cruel that God should have allowed Christ to suffer, or should have demanded the sacrifice of his innocent

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Son for the sins of mankind, are intelligently answered in the contention of the New Testament that "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world: but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3: 17). Whatever else the Atonement means, it does not mean that God, a divine despot, became so angry with humanity that He could be appeased by nothing but the sacrifice of his only begotten Son. The conception is both repulsive and contrary to the plain teaching of Scripture.

The New Testament writers make it plain that by his death Jesus Christ purchased the forgiveness of sins for believing men and women. The detailed explanation as to how the Atonement took place—that is, the theory of the Atonement—was, however, largely worked out by the believers of the later centuries, but always of course in an honest attempt to interpret the teaching of the Word.

In the second century there arose the grotesque idea that the death of Jesus Christ constituted a ransom which God paid the Devil for the release of men's souls from bondage. Such a conception of course is entirely without warrant in Scripture.

Abelard (about 1150) advanced the Moral Influence Theory, which holds that the object of Christ's sacrifice on the cross was to produce a moral effect upon the individual sinner, subduing his aversion to God and bringing him to see the immensity of God's love for him. In the so-called Governmental Theory, Hugo

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Grotius (1645) maintained that in the Atonement God had given an imposing example of suffering whereby He demonstrated his determination that sin should not be indulged with impunity. By this suffering on the part of the innocent victim, guilty man was warned of God's determination to repress sin, and the sufferings of Christ were designed to constitute a deterring motive for the sinner.

In the eleventh century Anselm, the renowned Archbishop of Canterbury, in his famous *Cur Deus Homo*, advanced the so-called satisfaction theory, which was later adopted by the Protestant reformers and embodied in practically all Protestant creeds.

In the Atonement, according to this view, the love of God is shown forth and the justice of God is vindicated. If God in the death of Jesus Christ wished only to show forth his divine compassion, there is no reason why He should not have done this by some act of omnipotence and thus have freed the sinner from his sin and made him happy. But man by his sin has placed himself under God's condemnation. How is God to forgive him? If in pure benevolence He pushes the sin aside and says that it is of no consequence, He violates those elements of justice in his nature which are just as important as is his benevolence. Something must be done, therefore, which will enable a God who is both loving and just to forgive man's sins without violating either his justice or his love. If God inflicts punishment upon the sinner, He satisfies his justice but does

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not satisfy his love. Furthermore, while He would revenge Himself upon the sinner, He would not save him from his sin. The only way in which the attribute of justice in the divine nature can be satisfied is by a substituted or vicarious offering. No man can make this offering, because a sinner cannot justify a sinner. Furthermore, man's transgression against God is an infinite thing; the punishment required is an eternal punishment. There must, therefore, be an offering in the form of sacrifice of a being who is infinite, that he may satisfy the infinite guilt of man, and at the same time of a being who is human, that he may partake of the nature of the sinner. Something must be offered, to use Anselm's phrase, that is "greater than all that is not God." But God alone is greater than all that is not God, therefore God alone can make this satisfaction.

The vicarious Atonement, therefore, can be effected only by the God-Man. He can give to God more than the whole creation combined could offer. His offering alone can satisfy the justice of God as well as show forth his love. This divine-human sacrifice and obedience contributed therefore a surplusage which might overflow and redound to the benefit of a third party. That third party is the sinner. Christ's sacrifice has laid up grace for him which he may appropriate through faith. When he has this grace he has the forgiveness of sins, and when he has the forgiveness of sins he has salvation and eternal life.

Thus does the theologian, in terms hard for the com-

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mon run of folk to understand, explain the simple contention of the New Testament, "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." Let us see if we cannot make it easier for these modern minds of ours to comprehend.

The New Testament undoubtedly teaches that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, not only to teach men the way of life, but at last by his death to purchase for them eternal salvation. We must never forget that for centuries the mind of the Jew had been prepared for the conception that remission of sins is brought about by the shedding of blood, and that the blood of an innocent victim. But why an innocent victim? This appears to be grossly unjust. Nothing could be fairer than that a man should suffer for his own sin, but that a man should suffer for the sins of others has often appeared a colossal injustice which has driven multitudes into bitterness of spirit.

Yet looking at life realistically, we see not only that man suffers frequently for the sins of others; we observe that when such suffering is faithfully and patiently endured, it has a way of enriching life and deepening spiritual power to a degree with which nothing else can compare. "Greater love hath no man than this," said Jesus, "that a man lay down his life for his friends." Nothing will break the power of sin so effectively as for an innocent person willingly to assume the penalty of another's guilt. If the vicarious suffering of a good mother for a wicked son will not touch his heart at last

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and bring him to repentance, then we can be assured that he has sinned himself into a state in which no human agency can produce repentance. There is nothing so mighty to the breaking of the power of sin as is the idea of the vicarious sacrifice of one person for another.

We have observed in a previous chapter that since human personality appears to be the highest thing we know, God must have personality, else He has endowed man with something higher than He Himself possesses. We can also be sure of this, that whatever in the highest reach of personality and character holds true in the case of man holds true also in the case of God. If vicarious sacrifice works among men and is the greatest power in overcoming evil, we would expect that vicarious sacrifice would in the case of God have an immeasurable power. The New Testament assures us that this is true. Vicarious sacrifice produces in the relationship between God and man the same kind of moral results that it produces between man and man.

When God set Himself to redeem man from his sin and had to provide something that would overcome the insuperable barrier of human disobedience, He employed the most powerful thing in the world, love. And He furthermore employed this love in a fashion which even ignorant humanity has come to appreciate as its most effective form—namely, vicarious sacrifice. In his love He provided that some one should be given the opportunity to take upon Himself vicariously the sins of humanity. No merely human being could ever do

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this. The soul of every man is too replete with sin to allow him to bear the burden of the world's sin. Therefore in his love God sent his only begotten Son, who is sinless and innocent, to do for mankind what mankind could not do for itself—atone for sin which had not only violated the love of God but the justice of God as well.

But this Son whom He sent was God Himself. When the Son suffered, God suffered. Therefore, by an amazing act of love, of which only God Himself could be capable, He provided that man was to be saved from the consequences of his sin through the experience of forgiveness and therefore of reconciliation. This Son was incarnate in the flesh, being conceived "by the power of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary of her substance," and then after a life of suffering and contradiction was at last crucified, the just for the unjust, that he might reconcile us to God. Behind this divine sacrifice was God's love, not his wrath. He loved mankind to such an extent that He was willing in the person of his Son to take upon Himself the sins of the disobedient and suffer for them cruelly upon the tree. And in this sacrifice He not only showed forth his divine love for mankind, but He satisfied that insistent demand for justice which, in the Almighty Ruler of a moral and spiritual universe, is just as important as is the attribute of love.

After the sun went down upon his earthly existence, Jesus was heard to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15: 34.) He was

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experiencing the last extremity of agony. When he took upon himself the sins of mankind, he had to go the full limit of that suffering. The last limit was complete separation from God. He who had lived his whole life in the joy of God's presence, was compelled in the last moment of his life to experience as the consequence of assuming man's sin the extreme penalty which the guilt of sin involves—namely, separation from God. They spat in his face and made a merry jest of his sufferings. They drove him up the hill to Calvary like an animal, and when he was raised upon the cross reviled him as a malefactor. Yet in the midst of all these indignities he opened not his mouth in protest. He asked only that the Heavenly Father would be merciful upon them, for in their cruel wickedness they knew not what they did. But when at last the burden of the sin which he who knew no sin had voluntarily assumed came between himself and God and completely hid from him the face of his Father, the Suffering Servant, the Beloved Son, cried out in uncontrollable anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

They buried him that night in Joseph's lovely garden. The kindly hands of Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea wrapped his broken body in clean linen and laid it in a sepulcher hewn in stone wherein never man before was laid.

The darkness that came down upon the world that night was not to be compared with the darkness that

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came down upon the hearts of his disciples. Surely this was the end—yea, the end of all things; for if virtue could thus perish, where indeed was that God of their fathers who had promised to send One who should redeem Israel? They did not know, nor could they know, that men in all future ages would look back on that dark and murderous day and call it not Bad Friday or Evil Friday, but Good Friday. Jesus' repeated assurance that he must die in fulfillment of the glorious promise of the Scriptures had fallen on ears too dulled by human ways of thinking to comprehend its significance. They could not understand, as yet, that "it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2: 10). They could not know the old Passover was at an end, that the old leaven had been purged out, and that Christ the eternal Passover had been sacrificed in their behalf. And on that Friday night of gloom so indescribable that mankind has never known its like before or since, they could not know what they were to know so perfectly a few days later, and what the Church of Jesus Christ knows with such confidence to this present hour: that as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of One were many made righteous; and that in this second Adam the sinner should find the remission of his sins and enter by faith into the fellowship of that New Humanity which God had promised to give in the fullness of his love.

## VII

### "HE DESCENDED INTO HELL; THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD"

WE come now to the darkest day in the history of the Christian Church—the Saturday, or Jewish Sabbath, during which Christ's body lay in the tomb. He died on Friday afternoon; his resurrection occurred Sunday morning about dawn. The statement of the Creed which follows the declaration that he was buried is, "He descended into hell."

There are many to whom this declaration is so repugnant that they refuse to affirm it. Certainly no other statement of the Creed is so obscure as is this one. It was the last clause added to the Creed. Rufinus, about the year 400, speaks of it as part of the Creed of Aquileia, but is careful to note that the statement does not appear in the Creed of Rome. The Eastern Church has never incorporated this statement in any of its creeds. Mention is made, however, of the so-called *Descensus* by most of the Apostolic Fathers, including Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Origen.

The word *hell* in the Old Testament—the Hebrew word *Sheol*—has a twofold meaning. Sometimes it means simply the grave; at other times the place where

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the wicked are punished. In the New Testament the English word *hell* is represented by two different Greek nouns—Gehenna and Hades. Gehenna, a valley near Jerusalem, which was considered accursed because in antiquity it had been used for human sacrifice, represented the place where the wicked are retained for judgment. The other Greek word also rendered *hell* in English is *Hades*, which really means the place of the dead.<sup>1</sup>

Various reasons have been given for Christ's descent into Hades. Martin Luther taught that the crucifixion was the last act of Jesus' humiliation, and the descent into hell was the first act of his spiritual exaltation. He went, Luther said, with banners flying that he might break down the doors of hell and show himself victor over Satan. In the primitive church it was believed that Jesus had descended to the abode of departed spirits in order to visit and instruct the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament. The statement in 1 Peter 3: 18 and 19, that Christ went and "preached unto the spirits in prison," has been variously interpreted to mean that he led the patriarchs from the lower confines of Hades into the bliss of Paradise; that he preached to those who had refused to hear Noah previous to the Flood; that he announced to those who had died in the faith previous to his coming, the full significance of his gospel; and by some, that he even extended again to the unrepentant the opportunities for salvation which

<sup>1</sup> *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Davis; Article, "Hell."

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they had neglected on earth. There is, however, no scriptural authority for the last-named belief, and the others are conjectures based upon vague and obscure scriptural statements.

Calvin, in his *Institutes*,<sup>2</sup> lays emphasis on the fact that Peter declared that God raised Christ up, "having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it" (Acts 2: 24). He calls attention to the great spiritual sufferings with which Christ approached his death and maintains that this was not just because he feared the physical pains of death, but because it was necessary for him "to contend with the powers of hell and the horror of eternal death." As the Sin-Bearer, he suffered the death which God inflicts upon transgressors; and such being the case, since he sustained the character of a sinner, it was necessary that he should experience from God all the tokens of that divine wrath with which God punishes sin. In other words, Calvin carries out to the extreme the idea that Christ shared all the common experiences of sinful man by maintaining that he not only bore the sins of man upon the cross, but that, "by contending with the power of the devil, with the dread of death, and with the pains of hell, he obtained the victory and triumphed over them; that in death we may no longer dread those things which our Prince has destroyed."

There are certain in the Anglican Church who believe

<sup>2</sup> Book II, Ch. 16, Sec. II.

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and teach that Christ descended into hell for the purpose of resuming his body. They would put the semicolon, therefore, not after the word "hell," but after the words "third day," and have the declaration read, "He descended into hell the third day; he rose again from the dead;" by which they mean that early on the third day the soul of Jesus went down into Hades to resume that glorified body in which he communed during forty days with his disciples.

There is still another group which maintains that the statement about the descent has no place whatever in the Creed. They maintain that the statement, "He descended into hell," simply means that he went into the grave, and that it was at certain times in the early history of the Creed used as a substitute for the declaration, "was crucified, dead, and buried," When later the statement that he "was crucified, dead, and buried" was reincorporated in the Creed, the statement that he descended into hell, which had been meant only as a substitute for the former, was still retained; and all sorts of explanations have later been made to explain its meaning. The contention made by this group is that since the declaration, "He descended into hell," means the same thing as "He was crucified, dead, and buried," both statements should not be retained in the Creed; and furthermore that the attempt to explain the statement about the descent by attributing to Christ a profound spiritual activity from the time of his death to that of

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his resurrection is entirely unjustified by the authority of Scripture.

It is true that the full meaning of this statement of the Creed is so obscure that the most orthodox teachers of the Church in all ages have interpreted it in various ways. It should be said, however, that, regardless of how we interpret this statement and regardless also of what we may believe about Christ's spiritual activity between the time of death and the time of resurrection, the fact remains that to drop from the Creed this statement about the *Descensus* would break that continuity of events which begins in pre-existence, emerges into human life through the incarnation, and comes to spiritual triumph in the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension. There would be a period in our Lord's career unaccounted for—namely, the thirty-five or forty hours which elapsed between his burial on Friday afternoon and his resurrection on Sunday morning. Therefore, in the interests of continuity, if for no other reason, the statement about the descent into hell has a place in the Creed.

But it renders a spiritual service also. Regardless of what Christ may or may not have done after his death and before his resurrection, we are certainly led to believe that he sanctified and blessed with his presence the graves of believers. The present condition of the dead has not been revealed to us, but the deepest promptings of our faith convince us that they are being provided for in the fullness of God's love; and surely for

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every Christian believer there should be infinite consolation in the realization that wherever our departed loved ones may be, the place to which they have gone was visited and blessed by Christ himself between the hour of his death and that of his resurrection.

We cannot treat lightly or with disdain any statement about spiritual realities which involves implications as far-reaching as these, no matter how obscure its meaning may be in certain of its details.

The next statement of the Creed brings us to the most joyful day in Christian history. We are told that on the third day our Lord Jesus rose from the dead. It was of more than ordinary significance that the resurrection took place at dawn, for with the first intimations of this supreme spiritual triumph there dawned for the world a day of hope and joy which our faith leads us to believe will never end. It is true that the Christian Church was born, not on Easter Sunday, but on Pentecost; but the confidence and faith which the disciples needed in order that they might receive the Holy Spirit in all his fullness was conferred upon them by the events that happened during those forty days when Christ was appearing to his disciples.

Because many people who sincerely want to be followers of Jesus Christ find it hard to believe the resurrection, it might be well for us to ask ourselves, What is the basis of this belief? We should first of all remind ourselves that throughout his ministry Jesus frequently

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referred both to his approaching death and to his resurrection. When Peter first among men declared Jesus to be Christ the Son of the Living God, Jesus immediately began to tell the disciples how "the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8: 31). Yet it is an amazing fact that when the resurrection actually occurred, the disciples could scarcely believe it. They were so stunned by the tragedy of the crucifixion that they either forgot what Christ had told them or found it impossible in their sorrow to believe that it could be true.

Jesus appears to have shown himself during the forty days of his resurrection at least ten times: to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16: 9; John 20: 11-18); to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16: 12; Luke 24: 13-32); to Peter on the same day (Luke 24: 34; 1 Cor. 15: 5); to the ten Apostles, Thomas only being absent (John 20: 19-25); to all the Apostles, including Thomas (Mark 16: 14; John 20: 26-29; 1 Cor. 15: 7); to the women at the sepulcher (Matthew 28: 9, 10); again to the Apostles (and at the same time probably to five hundred brethren about whom Paul speaks) (Matthew 28: 16-20; 1 Cor. 15: 6); to seven disciples at Tiberias (John 21: 1-24); to James (1 Cor. 15: 7); and to the Apostles at the time of the ascension (Mark 16: 15-18; Luke 24: 44-50; Acts 1: 4-8; 1 Cor. 15: 7). At a later date he appeared to Saul of Tarsus, and the last

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statement of the young martyr Stephen was that he saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.

There is no way, of course, of proving the resurrection save as any circumstance is regarded as proved if a sufficient number of credible witnesses can be produced. There were plenty of witnesses to the resurrection. They were all in agreement on one thing—namely, that they had seen the Lord. It was not merely a subjective experience. Some modern writers have tried to explain the resurrection by saying that the disciples had lived so near to the Master during his earthly ministry that after his death they gradually became filled with the conviction that in reality Christ had never died. But this, of course, is quite contrary to the testimony of Scripture. The disciples were not predisposed to believe the resurrection even though Jesus had repeatedly told them it would occur. They could not believe the women when they returned from the sepulcher with their strange, wild story. Furthermore, the resurrection was not the quiet growth of a privately held conviction, but a series of appearances which turned a dejected and despairing group of men and women into the most enthusiastic and joyful band the world has ever known.

The only sensible way to explain how the defeated disciples could have been turned into such triumphant heralds of a new spiritual order is the way the New Testament explains it. It says that on the third day the

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risen Christ began to appear to his disciples. Any other explanation is strained and unnatural. It is true that some of the details of the resurrection story are, to say the least, confusing. But this, as a matter of fact, really adds weight to the testimony. It is acknowledged in legal circles that if a group of witnesses testify to an occurrence and agree in their testimony to the smallest detail, the chances are that it is a fabrication; but if on the other hand they agree in all of the essential facts and disagree in the details, their testimony is much more credible. The resurrection story seems perfectly to meet these requirements of sound testimony.

Under the pressure of excitement it was natural that the testimony of the different disciples regarding the resurrection should not have been in entire agreement as regards details; but in the matter of the essentials there was not the slightest deviation in their witnessing. They had seen the Lord; they had talked with him. Peter said that they ate and drank with him after the resurrection. It was not a mere spirit that flashed across their pathway for an instant and disappeared; the Lord was risen indeed, the beloved one whom they had laid in the tomb was back again in the midst of them, transformed in many respects it is true, but nevertheless their dear Lord and friend, for whom they had forsaken all that they might follow him.

The testimony of the New Testament is not only undeviating in the fact that Christ rose from the dead; it is equally positive in its assertion as to the nature of

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his resurrection. The tomb was found empty. *Christian faith is based on the empty tomb.* If what appeared was only Christ's spirit, then most of the profound implications of the resurrection are lost. The resurrection was not just the appearance of Christ's spirit, but the actual resurrection of the body which had been laid in the tomb. It was the same body that had been crucified, yet in a most amazing fashion transformed. By some mysterious process known only to God Himself, the physical body which had succumbed to the torments of crucifixion was transformed in the way we believe our bodies will be transformed in the general resurrection of the dead. Our bodies must decay and go back to the earth again; but Christ's body was an exception to this universal rule. It did not experience corruption. It was transformed at once into that glorified state which we are told is to be the final and transcendent experience of the faithful.

This new body of Christ was sufficiently like the old body so that his disciples recognized him and fellowshiped with him as they had in the days before the resurrection, only in an immeasurably more spiritual fashion. But his body had evidently been profoundly changed. Two of his disciples walked with him for several miles along the road to Emmaus and did not recognize him. When Mary saw him in the early morning light, she thought he was the gardener. It was the Lord that had been crucified, and his body was the same body that on the tree had suffered the torments of sin.

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But under the power of God's Spirit some great transformation had occurred which had turned the body in which he suffered into the glorious body with which he rose from the dead.

It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was not the re-appearance of a spirit, but the resurrection of everything that went to make up his personality. Not only did his spirit return, but the body in which it had tabernacled was also raised up, glorified by the mysterious working of the Spirit of God whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.

Whatever else even the most skeptical see fit to deny about the resurrection, there is one thing that no one can deny: it transformed the crushed and defeated disciples into triumphant prophets of a new spiritual order. On Friday night the last extremity of defeat was conceded; by Sunday noon a new thrill of life had gone through the little band of believers; and by the time Christ ascended into heaven, there was not a disciple whose faith had not been revitalized and established in a fashion that even the tortures of persecution could not disturb.

Most modern Christians, if asked to explain the significance of the resurrection, would probably reply that the resurrection is the divine confirmation of the immortality of the soul. As a matter of fact that is only one of many things which the resurrection con-

firms and, be it said in all reverence, not the chief thing. It was the spiritual implications of the resurrection which thrilled the disciples rather than his actual appearing. The resurrection was not simply the divine attestation of the fact that there is a glorious eternity in which the faithful will find their place. All the early disciples believed this. It never crossed their minds that they would spend their eternity anywhere else than in heaven. It is true that the resurrection confirmed this belief for them, and this, of course, added to their joy; but what made the resurrection such an experience of exaltation was the fact that it constituted a divine confirmation of certain hopes and beliefs relative to the kingdom of God which they had long cherished.

In the first place, the resurrection proved to the disciples that Christ was the Messiah. It therefore permitted them to experience a complete triumph over their doubts. When they laid him in the tomb on Friday evening, they laid their hearts in the tomb with him. They had been mistaken, it seemed, as no group of men had ever been mistaken. By every means, human and divine, they had been led to believe that this Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. But God had let him suffer, had delivered him to an outrageous and cruel death. Could anything be clearer proof than this that their hope in Jesus as the Messiah had been unfounded?

Then suddenly, less than forty hours after his burial, this Jesus, on whom cruelty had vented all its indig-

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nities, arose from the dead with indescribable glory and proceeded to disclose himself to the disciples. When they stood at the foot of Calvary on Friday morning and looked up at the cross, they could see in it nothing but hopeless defeat; but when on Sunday morning they stood beside the open sepulcher and looked back upon the cross, this symbol of shame and defeat was invested with a glory the like of which human eye had never before beheld.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was now the great new fact in their lives to which every other fact in life must be readjusted. The judgment of the Sanhedrin in condemning Jesus to death was now revealed to be the ignorant and wicked judgment of religious leaders who had lost all contact with God. The hearts of Cleopas and his disciple burned within them as the risen Master talked with them by the way and opened to them the scriptures, explaining how it was that the Christ had to suffer these things that he might enter into his glory.

The shame of the cross disappears with the resurrection. From that time forth it becomes in the Christian message, not an incident to be avoided or explained away, but the circumstance by which everything else in the spiritual life is explained. It behooved the Christ to suffer that he might enter into his glory. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24: 27.) They were to go out now and

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preach a crucified Christ raised from the dead, and the twofold circumstances of his dying and his resurrection would for all time constitute the heart of their message.

If the resurrection had not occurred, nothing in the world would have convinced the disciples that Christ was really the Messiah. They would have been the most disillusioned group of men in the history of the race. But almost instantly with the appearing of Christ, their despair was dissipated, their courage returned, and they went forth to proclaim Christ with an enthusiasm which no amount of persecution could suppress. The resurrection had proved to them that this Jesus was indeed the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

In the second place, the resurrection, by convincing the disciples that Jesus was still alive, gave them an indescribable triumph over their sorrow. It is a marvelous fact that never again in the New Testament does one catch even the slightest note of sorrow, save that sorrow which the righteous always experience as they confront the ghastly fact of sin either in their own lives or in the lives of others. When Christ ascended into heaven and the disciples returned to Jerusalem, there was not a note of sorrow uttered over his departure. For in fact he had not departed. He had promised he would be with them always, even unto the end of the world; and in the resurrection that promise had been fulfilled. Even though they lived many years, how short a season that would be compared with the eternity

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which the resurrection vouchsafed to them! Until death called them, whether that be soon or on some far distant day, they could be sure that the Lord Jesus was with them in an even more glorious fellowship than they had known in the days of his flesh. Furthermore, it must never be forgotten that these early disciples expected the speedy return of Christ in glory. Day by day as they lived in this new transcendent experience which the resurrection had produced, their hope in his Second Coming increased, and with it the conviction that it would be only a short time until they and the blessed Lord would be reunited for eternity.

What did it matter, therefore, that the world despised them and persecuted them? We are told that in later years when Paul and Silas were almost beaten to death and thrown half dead into the Philippian prison, at midnight they prayed and sang praises to God. There was no device of torture by which a wicked world could break the joyful spirit of such men. And there was but one explanation of it—they had seen the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, and that experience had given them a spiritual triumph against which the devices of men could never prevail.

The resurrection is the everlasting refutation of the fallacy that religion may be thought of in terms of gloom and repression. True Christianity represents the only complete victory men can ever have over their sorrows; and the hope upon which their triumph rests is the conviction of believers in every age that Christ

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Jesus rose from the dead and offers to everyone who has faith to receive it the sustaining power of his presence in the midst of life's sorrows.

The third thing that the resurrection signified to the disciples was the triumph of spirit over flesh, of righteousness over sin. Paul never tires of making this emphasis. The fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians is the chapter of Christian hope. There may be some who prefer the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians to any other passage in the New Testament, and still others who regard the fourteenth and fifteenth chapters of John as the most precious spiritual legacies the Word of God confers. But it is hard to see how any passage in the New Testament can surpass in significance and appeal the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians. In it Paul not only enumerates the appearances of the risen Lord, but dwells in a very profound fashion on the spiritual significance of the resurrection. He intimates that there are some in the Corinthian Church who say that there is no resurrection of the dead. But, he avers, if there is no resurrection for you and me, then Christ is not risen, "and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith also is vain; . . . ye are yet in your sins." Such preaching would be vain because the proclamation of the gospel rested on the twofold circumstance of crucifixion and resurrection, and the denial of either invalidated the gospel. The faith of the disciples under these circumstances was vain because the crucifixion of Christ was in no way divinely certi-

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fied as a vicarious atonement for sin if the resurrection did not occur. But most appalling of all, if the resurrection did not occur, Christian believers were yet in their sins. The coming of Christ had made no real difference in the most tragic circumstance of life, that of human sin.

But why? How did the resurrection achieve the triumph of righteousness over sin?

It did so first of all because it declared on the authority of God Himself that spirit is triumphant over flesh. It seemed that nothing could ever triumph over such a combination as the Roman Empire and the Jewish Sanhedrin. The resurrection was God's way of saying in the concrete language of actual events that the power and pretense of man are a ridiculous travesty on reality. The Almighty looks down with scorn upon the wicked devices of men and brushes them aside with his hand. In the resurrection Jesus had come back to assure his disciples that they need never again fear the power of human sin; that the power of the spirit was indescribably superior to the power of the flesh; and that, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, the victory of God over the wickedness of man was already an established fact.

But even more than this general victory over sin was the victory which the resurrection promised them as individuals. The Law instructed man in matters of righteousness. But its efficacy depended upon the will of man, and all experience indicated that this is a weak

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and vacillating factor upon which to depend for one's salvation. In the Incarnation God had given men a living object for their faith, and by their devotion to this living person men were to be won to righteousness rather than driven to righteousness. The inspiring claim of the Christian gospel is that righteousness is produced, not by external commandments but *by the reinforcement of the inner life*. The only righteousness that can survive the inclemencies of a tempting world is the righteousness men achieve, not as the result of commandments—even divinely given commandments—but as the result of a profound spiritual fellowship which they may enjoy with God Himself.

Now Jesus Christ makes this fellowship possible. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4: 12.) If Christ did not arise from the dead, then this spiritual fellowship is not possible, for the one through whom men have their fellowship with God is not a living Saviour but a martyred teacher, over whom death won a tragic victory. All the possibility of that supreme righteousness which Christ by his coming made possible—that divine reinforcement of the inner life which results in the transformation of motives and acts—is invalidated if Christ did not rise from the dead; and it is invalidated simply because the spiritual fellowship upon which it depends is not possible unless Christ be in fact a risen

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and glorified Saviour. This transformation of men's natures cannot be brought about by a dead Christ.

It is true that when Christ expired on the cross he had brought about the forgiveness of sins by his vicarious atoning death. But the benefits of this sacrifice operate in men's lives only if they believe in it. The resurrection is the fact that above all others makes men believe in the atoning significance of the cross. The resurrection, therefore, as Paul contended, is the fountain of Christian righteousness—the source of that joy and hope which leads men to accept the proffered salvation of God.

Last of all, the resurrection constituted for Christian disciples of every age the triumph of life over death. It was more than a mere proclamation to Christian believers that God has provided a glorious eternity for the righteous after death. There is an even greater fact than this in the spiritual world—namely, that if men have faith, this divine life will come and establish itself among them and turn the whole of human existence into a thing of glory. The New Testament does not teach that heaven is only the reward of those who have died; its most glorious contention is that eternal life is the reward of the faithful, both on this side of the grave and beyond. The word "eternity" has to do not alone with the duration of life but equally with the quality of life. In the providence of God heaven begins right here on earth when men whose hearts have been changed by the power of the Holy Spirit begin to live

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by faith in the once crucified and forever living Redeemer.

The disciples, after that first Easter Sunday, strode out into the world, not only filled with a new hope, but possessed by a new quality of life. The coming of Christ in the flesh had made this new quality of life possible by purchasing for man the forgiveness of sins; and by his return in the resurrection of his full person, Christ had sealed these benefits unto all true believers.

The resurrection is just as significant at this moment and just as real as it was on that glad day two thousand years ago when men first realized that the Lord was back again in the midst of them. He was in truth the Messiah; he was living, not dead; he was the source of spiritual power by which they could forever triumph over sin. Finally, his coming was to make the believers of all ages conscious that they shared a vibrant quality of life which came from God Himself, and that they could face eternity with the conviction that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2: 9).

## VIII

“HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND SITTETH ON  
THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD THE FATHER AL-  
MIGHTY; FROM THENCE HE SHALL COME  
TO JUDGE THE QUICK AND THE DEAD”

THUS far, that portion of the Creed which deals with Jesus Christ has confined itself to a description of the nature of Christ and an account of his earthly ministry. It describes the nature of Christ by saying that he is God’s only begotten Son and the Lord of our lives. The means employed to achieve the Incarnation are described in the statement about the Virgin Birth. Our Lord’s earthly ministry is summed up in the declaration that he “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried.” The triumphant completion of Christ’s ministry is set forth in the difficult statements about the descent into hell and his resurrection from the dead. In this resurrected state Christ appeared a number of times to his disciples during the space of forty days, and numerous declarations of Scripture affirm that during this time Christ was teaching his disciples and revealing to them certain spiritual mysteries which enabled them to go out into the world and preach the gospel with certainty and power.

But the Creed, as we see, has thus far been dealing

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with Christ in his pre-existent and earthly state. Several great questions about Christ, however, remain to be answered before the believer's faith is fulfilled.

The first of these questions is this: *Where is Christ now?*

Living faith requires a living Christ; spiritual peace and assurance depend upon the extent to which we are conscious of a divine-human fellowship. Our faith can never be complete and satisfying until we have the assurance not only that Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification, but that somewhere or somehow *he continues to exist in God's spiritual universe, and at this very moment is engaged in certain spiritual activities in our behalf.*

The declaration of the Creed regarding the present whereabouts of Christ is that he ascended into heaven. Luke tells us in his gospel that "he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24: 50, 51). In the book of The Acts the same writer says that "while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And, while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1: 9-11).

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While it is true that the Gospels of Matthew and John make no mention of an ascension, and that Mark mentions it only in that portion of the sixteenth chapter which is acknowledged to have been appended some years after the Gospel itself was written, nevertheless, the many references to the ascension which we find in other portions of the New Testament indicate that this closing circumstance in the life of Jesus was practically unchallenged in the early Church. Every Christian creed both in the Eastern and in the Western Church affirms the resurrection and ascension. There can be no doubt that on a certain well-remembered day the resurrection appearances of Jesus came to an end, and he who had come from the bosom of the Father returned again to that spiritual power and glory of which he had voluntarily divested himself during the period of incarnation.

On one occasion Jesus told his disciples that it was expedient that he go away (John 16: 7). In addition to the reason he gives—that the Comforter may come—we can feel justified in drawing certain other inferences.

In the first place, the relationships which Christ sustained with his disciples during the forty days following the resurrection were unnatural and, to a certain extent, strained. They could not by their very nature be otherwise. Christ's body had been spiritualized; the disciples were still in the flesh. Inspiring as these post-resurrection contacts must have been, there was never-

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theless about them an unnaturalness which could not well be continued indefinitely.

Then again, as long as Jesus was in the world his influence was localized. It was fitting that he should return to a spiritual state in which he could minister to men everywhere and in all ages. The ascension made Christ available to the race and to all periods of time, as the incarnation had made him available to a little group in Palestine during a short period of world history. St. Paul tells us that he "ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things" (Eph. 4: 10). In his last discourse with the disciples—as recorded by John—he had told them that he was going away to prepare a place for them, and that afterward he would come again and receive them unto himself, that where he was there might his disciples be also. Matthew's Gospel ends with the declaration of Jesus to his disciples, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." On the Mount of Olives, in the vicinity of Bethany and near to the Garden of Gethsemane where he had suffered so acutely, Christ was finally raised into that glorified state in which we believe he continues to this hour.

We are to be supported with the realization not only that Christ is still alive, but that his going away makes it possible for him to be as near to us as he was to his disciples. The ascension was not a far-distant occurrence which has no practical significance for modern man. It is intended to comfort and assure our hearts

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with the realization that Christ still lives and is near to everyone who trusts him.

The second question which arises in our minds about the Christ who rose from the dead is this: *What is he now doing?*

The New Testament repeatedly says that he is sitting on the right hand of God, a truth which the Creed affirms. As Calvin, however, has pointed out, this statement relates "not to the posture of his body, but to the majesty of his dominion; so that *sitting* signifies no other than presiding at the tribunal of heaven."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the terms *sitting* and *standing* are symbolic attempts to describe the present glorified state of Christ in heaven.

Throughout the New Testament the fact is continually emphasized that Christ has become our Mediator before the throne of grace. The verb *to mediate* means to interpose as a mutual friend between parties. Christ, therefore, as our Mediator, is one who in his present state is actually engaged in bringing God and man together.

Very often this statement of the Creed that Christ "ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty" conveys the impression that Christ is now removed from humanity; that the grace of God operates automatically in behalf of the

<sup>1</sup> *Institutes*, Book I, Ch. 16, Sec. 15.

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faithful; and that Christ, no longer burdened with any care, simply lives in the glory and triumph of his exalted position.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In the first place, the ascension did not remove Christ from humanity, but made it possible for him to come into intimate contact with men of all ages. Again, the Bible assures us that Christ in heaven is at this present moment continually active in our behalf. The conception of a Christ far removed, interested only in enjoying his perfect fellowship with God, could not but have about it a certain lack of love for mankind and a selfishness which would tend to cool the faith even of the most ardent. But the Bible encourages us to believe that with fuller opportunities than the incarnation made possible, Christ in his exalted state is now every moment exercising himself in our behalf.

The Atonement, of course, was achieved by his death. God and man were reconciled by his dying. But the Atonement was not just a great divine event which automatically operated to the salvation of men's souls; the spiritual possibilities of the Atonement must be continually applied. If we are justified in using the word *process* to describe certain things that go on in the spiritual world, then we can say that Christ's present concern is to keep continually in operation the spiritual process which results in men's salvation.

We do not know the exact meaning of the Biblical declaration that Christ is continually making interces-

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sion for us. Finite terms are inadequate to set forth spiritual ideas. But we believe that in some way, high above our comprehension, Jesus Christ is daily interceding for us before the throne of grace and is every day causing the benefits of his atoning death to operate in our behalf.

Between ourselves and this glorified state of Christ, there is indeed that wide chasm which the difference between the finite and the infinite renders inevitable. We are still in the confines of the flesh. Our minds are such that we could not understand the mysteries of this other world even if they were suddenly to be revealed to us. We have no capacity for comprehending them. We are simply to live in the faith that beyond that chasm—in the infinite glory of another world—we have a Saviour whose every thought and act constitute a loving attempt to lift us from our sinful estate and establish us in the favor of God. We bridge the gap between ourselves and this infinite world by faith, by righteous obedience, by the use of the Lord's Supper, and by prayer.

Nothing in the entire Creed—not even the declarations about the saving work of Christ—is more inspiring than this assurance that right at this present moment Christ is spiritually active in our behalf. As the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "We have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God . . . , " and "this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he

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is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 4: 14; 7: 24, 25).

The next declaration of the Creed is, "Thence he will come."

At the time of the ascension we are told that two men (conjectured by some to be Moses and Elijah) stood by the disciples in white apparel and assured them that "This *same* Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in *like manner* as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Jesus spoke of his glorious return frequently. He affirmed that "the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds." It is most significant that this saying of Christ is reported in almost identical words by Matthew, Mark, and Luke (Matt. 16: 27; Mark 8: 38; Luke 9: 26). His second coming was the chief theme of many of his parables. The disciples were to look for their Lord as servants awaiting the return of their master from a wedding; as virgins that go forth to meet the bridegroom; as stewards who upon the return of their master will be called to account for their use of the talents which he has entrusted to them. His second coming was something about which Christ appeared to be as sure as he was of his crucifixion and resurrection.

This belief laid mighty hold upon the minds and

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hearts of the disciples. Never in the history of the world has there lived a group who watched for the return of the Lord with such joyful expectation as did those who had seen him ascend into heaven and had heard the promise that he would return "in like manner" as they had seen him go into heaven. For the most part they expected a speedy and almost immediate return; but a careful reading of the Scriptures shows that they were not justified in this belief. While many of Christ's declarations seem to point to his return to earth shortly after his ascension, such declarations must be read in the light of others which clearly indicate that a long period of time must elapse between the ascension and the advent.

Christ is said to have given utterance to the parable of the nobleman and the pounds (Luke 19: 11-27) to correct a false impression which his disciples had "that the Kingdom of God should *immediately* appear." In the so-called "Great Commission" (Matt. 28: 19, 20) Christ instructs his disciples to "teach all nations," and this of course would require a long period of time. The last question the disciples asked him had to do with the second coming. Just before the ascension they put to him the question, "Lord, wilt thou *at this time* restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1: 6.) Jesus' answer was that they were not to know times and seasons, but that after they had received the Holy Ghost they were to go out into the world to be witnesses "both in Jersualem, and in all Judea, and in

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Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1: 6-8). Very evidently Jesus anticipated that between his ascension and his second coming a long period of time would elapse.

But he made his second coming so plain to his disciples that no one who trusts the authority of the Word can deny it. His return is sure; the time of his return no one knows. Even Jesus himself knew it not in the days of his flesh. His coming will be a great supernatural event, and his purpose in coming is that he may receive his people to himself; that he may take to himself the Church as his bride; that he may complete the work of redemption by raising our bodies and fashioning them after his own glorified state; that he may restore all things; that he may regenerate the world and make it a new place; and that he may establish himself as the complete sovereign of all creation. He is to return in the fullness of his being, which means in the fullness of his humanity as well as in the fullness of his divinity. And he is to take the believer into a state in which everything that makes up his personality will be glorified and exalted.

There have been two dissimilar theories held by believers as to when Christ's return will be effected. One is known as premillennialism. Those who hold this view base their position chiefly on a literal interpretation of Revelation 20: 1-10. They maintain that, after a certain period of anti-Christian apostasy, Christ will

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suddenly appear and commence a personal reign in Jerusalem which will extend over a thousand years. The dead in Christ (some say only the martyrs) will rise and reign with him, and the overwhelming majority of the living will be converted and live during a period of great prosperity and happiness. In the meantime the Jews will be converted and restored to their own land. At the end of this period of a thousand years, there will for a short season be another period of apostasy, and this will be followed by the resurrection of the wicked and their final judgment and condemnation. At the same time there will be the final conflagration and new heavens and a new earth will appear.

This belief is called premillennial because its advocates maintain that the second coming of Christ will occur before the millennium.

The other belief is known as postmillennialism. Those who hold this view believe that the gospel will exercise an increasing influence over the whole human race "immeasurably more extensive and more thoroughly transforming than any it has ever realized in the past."<sup>2</sup> This increasing influence of the gospel will continue a thousand years, during which time, or at the commencement of which time, the Jews will be converted to Christianity. At the end of this thousand-year period, or millennium, and just before the coming of Christ, there will be a comparatively short season of

<sup>2</sup> *Outlines of Theology*, Hodge; Chap. 39, Ques. 7. Bible Institute.

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apostasy and a violent conflict between the forces of good and evil. When Christ comes, the general resurrection and judgment of all the dead will take place, the old order will be destroyed, and the new revealed.

Both these views are held by Christians of equally earnest persuasion. They differ chiefly in their opinion as to whether Christ will establish a kingdom on earth over which he will in his physical presence rule for a thousand years *before* the judgment, or whether this millennium will occur *before Christ's coming* and the advent be followed immediately by the resurrection and judgment of the dead. All are agreed that the following things are associated with the advent of Christ: A widespread diffusion of the gospel; a great change among the Jewish people; convulsions in the political and physical world; and finally, a great falling away from the faith, which will be attended by the emergence of a man of sin, the Antichrist.

But regardless of when the second coming of our Lord will be accomplished, both Christ and all his disciples made it perfectly plain that at a given time he will return. The return will be sudden, and we are urged to watch for that day with our loins girded about and our lights burning. "Blessed are those servants," said Jesus, "whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching. . . . And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. . . . Be ye therefore ready:

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... for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." (Luke 12: 37, 38, 40.)

The last declaration of this section of the Creed is that Christ will come "to judge the quick and the dead."

It is just as logical to believe that our world will come to an end as it is to believe that it once had a beginning. And, as someone has said, there will not only be an end, but the right kind of an end. This ending of the world will not be a catastrophe in which the universe, weighed down with its own iniquity, at last plunges headlong to destruction. It is to be an ending in which all the injustices that have ever occurred in the history of the race are to be righted; and they are to be righted by the coming of God's Judge, who will subdue all things unto himself.

By the very nature of this world there will be injustice in it to the end of time. No man here on earth receives his full justice, in the matter of either reward or punishment. Full and perfect justice is to be reserved for the last great day. As Anne of Austria once said to Richelieu, "God does not settle his accounts every day, my lord Cardinal, but He settles them all at last." The Bible is unmistakable in its teaching that the day will come when all accounts will be settled for all time and in perfect justice and love.

It will be recalled that during his lifetime Jesus never allowed himself to be considered a judge. "Who made

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me a judge or a divider over you?" (Luke 12: 14), he said in rebuke to one who asked that he intervene in a quarrel between brothers over an inheritance. Jesus was constantly making it plain that during his ministry on earth he would in no way act as a judge. But he also made it very plain that at the end of time God would commit all judgment into his hands, and that the whole race of mankind would at last stand before him in judgment.

He drew very arresting pictures of the nature of that judgment. Every human being that had ever lived would be called upon at the last day to stand before the judgment seat and give an account of the deeds done in the body. There is a judgment, to be sure, which goes on continually in the affairs of men. Every day God is bringing men to judgment. But this present judgment is to admonish and discipline; the last judgment will be something quite different. Its purpose will be to separate the good from the evil for all time, to vindicate the law of God, and to punish and expose the wicked.

It will be something which all men may well ponder with solemnity. Both men and angels will be judged on the last great day. It seems almost impossible to us, of course, that one being, even the divine Son of God, could address himself to the gigantic task of judging every human being that has ever lived. But the Bible is undeviating in its contention that all men will be judged, that they will be judged individually by

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Jesus Christ, and that this judgment will be of such a perfect character that every man's conscience will bear witness to its justice, and that no one, even the lost, will protest the divine decision.

Every man that ever lived will be judged in the light of his opportunities. No man will be held guilty for having failed to achieve or to know what he never had the opportunity to achieve or know. The Jews will be judged by the Law of Moses; the Christians by the Gospel. Those who had neither the Law nor the Gospel will be judged on the basis of the best they knew. Our Lord himself expressed the basis of judgment when he said, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (Luke 12: 47, 48.)

The Bible is very positive in its assertions as to what will be the lot of the righteous and the evil, respectively. There will be a definite line drawn between these two classes which will for all time separate them. The righteous will experience deliverance from sin, the perfection of their material and spiritual natures, the full development of all their faculties; and they will furthermore be accorded the privilege of eternal com-

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munion and fellowship with God in Jesus Christ and with the heavenly host.

On the other hand, the evil will experience a complete loss of even what little good they possess; will be consigned to the society of the lost; and will experience both an eternal alienation from God, and suffering which will cause weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Modern man does not like this picture and has tried in every way to get even the suggestion of it out of his thoughts, out of his philosophy of life, out of his theology. Modern preaching has in large measure studiously avoided any unpleasant reference to the possibility of eternal punishment after death. But it should never be forgotten that the most terrible words ever uttered concerning the sufferings of the lost were uttered by none other than Jesus himself. If Jesus intended us to take literally the descriptions he gives us of the final state of the wicked, then even the most righteous may well stand appalled before its indescribable horror. And even if we regard these descriptions as figurative (and many do so regard them),<sup>3</sup> unrepentant sin nevertheless carries with it a dreadful penalty.

We may be inclined to revolt against this whole conception and call it both unjust and unworthy of a loving God, but the description the Bible gives of the

<sup>3</sup> Dr. A. A. Hodge, one of the most conservative theologians of his day, did so regard them. See *Outlines of Theology*, p. 580.

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terrible penalties of unrepentant sin leads us to see that sin is something the terrible character of which even the most saintly among men cannot appreciate. Transgression of the will of God is evidently a matter of such fearful cosmic significance that God is justified in dealing with it in a way that at first shocks and stuns our moral nature. Since we cannot appreciate the holiness and righteousness of God, neither can we appreciate the heinousness of sinning against that holiness and righteousness. It is terrifying to think that any human being will ever be eternally lost and punished; but the Bible assures us that when, in a transformed spiritual state, we comprehend the goodness of God on the one hand, the enormous guilt of sin on the other, we shall be constrained to acquiesce in God's judgment of the wicked even though it should be our appalling misfortune to be numbered with those whom the righteous Judge shall condemn.

We may not like this picture of the final judgment, even though we may feel quite confident that we will be numbered among the blessed; but neither the final judgment nor this description of it is the invention of any man. The Bible teaches these things about the Great Assize and teaches them with such frank realism that even the most unlearned cannot fail to catch their meaning.

Every moment of our lives we are preparing ourselves for eternity by what we think, purpose, say, and do. Man has only one destiny, and that is a spiritual

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destiny. We are in this world for only one purpose—namely, to administer a spiritual stewardship which God has committed to us. The responsibility is an inconceivably solemn one. The reward of fidelity is eternal life with God.

## IX

### "I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST"

IN this chapter we are to try to make plain to ourselves one of the most difficult of Christian beliefs, and yet one which touches our daily lives even more intimately than any we have studied up to this point.

We have observed before that the Apostles' Creed is divided into three sections. The first deals with God the Father, the second with Jesus Christ the Son, the third with the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit. God the Father originated the plan of salvation; Jesus Christ the Son executed it; the Holy Spirit administers it.

The first fact we confront in our study of the Holy Spirit is that the Holy Spirit is a person. The testimony of the Bible is unwavering on this point. The Holy Spirit is referred to as "He," not as "It." He is a person, as God the Father is a person, and as Jesus Christ the Son is a person. His place is in the world, and his work is to act as the medium or agency through which the Father and the Son accomplish their purpose in the world.

The second fact which the Bible reveals about the Holy Spirit is that He is the third person of the divine Trinity.

It is impossible for the human mind to grasp how

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the one and only God can subsist in three persons. Yet in spite of the fact that it is hard for us to understand this, the New Testament reveals certain facts which make such a conclusion inevitable. Take as an example the baptism of Jesus. As our Lord came up out of the water a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." The fact that Jesus was referred to as "my beloved Son" indicates that the speaker was the Father. We are also told in the same passage that the Spirit descended upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Here we have a demonstration of the truth that the one Divine Being is manifested in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

This same teaching occurs in the New Testament on occasions too numerous to specify. In the fifteenth chapter of John, Jesus talks a great deal about himself, the Father, and the Holy Spirit as if they were three distinct and separate persons. The disciples are instructed by the risen Jesus himself to go and teach all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Paul speaks repeatedly of the Father, and of the Holy Spirit, and of the Son, in a way that makes it very clear that he recognized the existence of three divine persons. Yet this fact must always be considered with reference to that stupendous truth which lies at the basis of all Christian belief—namely, that there is but one God.

The Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. was so occupied with defining the second person of the Trinity that

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no attempt was made to define the nature of the Holy Spirit. At the Council of Constantinople, however, in 381 A.D., an attempt was made to define the relation of the Holy Spirit to the other two persons of the Trinity. At the ecclesiastical assembly at Toledo in 589 A.D. the Latin word *filioque* was added to the Creed of Constantinople, making the clause read, "We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son." This belief is held today by the Western Church, Catholic and Protestant alike. The Eastern Church has always maintained, however, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone, and controversy over this matter was one of the factors which led to that division of the Eastern and Western Churches which persists to this day.

Let us try to make this clear to our minds. The one God subsists in three persons. These three persons are one in essence. Each person possesses the whole essence, and each possesses all the divine qualities of the other two. In this way they are one. Yet the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each separate and distinct persons. In this sense they are three. The Father is always set forth as the first, the Son as the second, the Spirit as the third. They perform different functions. Creation is the function of the Father, redemption the function of the Son, and sanctification (or the growth and enrichment of the spiritual life) the function of the Holy Spirit. The Son is begotten of the

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Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son.

Now the more practical-minded may be led to ask whether a doctrine of this sort is really a matter of any consequence or has any direct bearing on everyday life; to which we must reply, that anything which is true is important. The Bible sets forth certain facts which the mysterious doctrine of the Trinity attempts to explain. The better we understand our religion, the more do we trust it; and since the working of the one God through three distinct persons appears to be a very real fact, although a great mystery, the Christian believer should know the fact although neither he nor anyone who has ever lived has been able to comprehend the mystery.

An understanding of the mystery of the Trinity is not, of course, necessary for salvation. If it were, no one would be saved, for no one understands this prodigious mystery. The complicated and highly metaphysical doctrine which the church fathers have worked out is but a feeble attempt to explain a great fact which the Bible discloses. Why this is true no one knows; but that it is part of the divine economy the Bible makes perfectly clear. As a great theologian has written, "We believe this, not because we understand it, but because thus has God revealed Himself."<sup>1</sup>

The third fact which a study of the Holy Spirit

<sup>1</sup> Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, Ch. 9, Sec. 94. Bible Institute.

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reveals is that the Holy Spirit is the power of God in this present world. The first fact is that He is a person; the second is that He is the third person of the Trinity; the third is that He is the divine power brought to bear unremittingly on the life of man and the circumstances of the world.

We should first of all remind ourselves that the Holy Spirit is the agent by whom Almighty God creates. We are told that of his creations three are outstanding. First, through the Holy Spirit He created the world. "The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." (Gen. 1: 2.) God created the heavens and the earth, but He did it through his Spirit. This Spirit was his creating power. His second great creation was the fashioning of a body in which the soul of his divine Son might be incarnated. This also was achieved through the Holy Spirit. The angel Gabriel announced to the Virgin Mary, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." (Luke 1: 35.) God's third great creation through the Holy Spirit was the Church. With the sound of a rushing, mighty wind filling all the house where the disciples were sitting the Holy Spirit came upon the chosen of God and constituted them the Church of Christ on earth, the body through which He would henceforth work (Acts 2: 1-4).

While this was an historic—in fact, the most historic

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—manifestation of the Holy Spirit, it was not the only manifestation, nor indeed the first. Mention has already been made of the fact that at the beginning of creation the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. But all through the history of the race the working of the Holy Spirit upon the lives of individuals and groups has been apparent. He inspired the Old Testament heroes and prophets. He inspired the Bible. We are told, in 2 Peter 1: 21, that “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” He clothed Himself with Gideon (Judges 6: 34). The Spirit of God came upon Saul and caused him to prophesy (1 Sam. 10: 10). He led the people of Israel through the varied circumstances of their national life, and revived them in their spiritual decline.

When we turn to the New Testament we find the Spirit, or the Spirit of God, or the Holy Spirit, performing the same offices. Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit at the time of baptism. This same Spirit drove him into the wilderness to be tempted. By the Spirit of God he cast out demons and performed his miracles. Under the power of that Spirit he preached the gospel. We are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews that through the eternal Spirit Christ offered himself without spot unto God. According to the spirit of holiness Christ was declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1: 4).

The Acts of the Apostles should really be called “The Acts of the Holy Spirit,” for it is the account of how

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the Holy Spirit, using the early disciples as instruments, established the Christian Church and spread the new faith.

This giving of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost was a spiritual occurrence the like of which the world had never known previous to that time and has never known since. We need not marvel at the fact that this occasion should have been marked by circumstances entirely without precedent. The occasion itself stands with the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus as one of the several greatest facts of history. Under these circumstances, therefore, we are not asked to believe anything unlikely when we are asked to accept as historically true the simple story of the giving of the Holy Spirit as related in the second chapter of the Acts.

Just as the resurrection of Jesus gave the disciples new hope, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit gave them new power. The rest of the New Testament is a description of what the Holy Spirit accomplished through the Apostles. He inspired and guided the teachers of the Church in both the great enterprises and the smallest details of their lives. He communicated to them certain gifts whereby they performed miracles and did many wonderful works. When they went out to preach, the power of the Holy Spirit was with them. What Jesus had begun to do and to teach in his earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit continued through the lives of his disciples.

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St. Paul maintained that it was the presence of the Spirit in men's hearts which set them free both from a slavish following of the law and from the bondage of sin. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God was at work in that early Christian community leading the disciples in their personal lives into that perfection of life which Jesus had achieved, and daily applying to their lives the redemption which the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ had accomplished.

The history of Christian progress from the Day of Pentecost until this present hour has been a history of the working of the Holy Spirit on the hearts and lives of believers and even of mankind in general.

Now what is the practical application of all this? Granted that the Holy Spirit is a great reality in the universe of God, wherein does this reality touch the life of the individual believer, and the circumstances of modern life?

Let us look first at the life of the individual believer.

In the New Testament we find the Holy Spirit performing a service to the spiritual life of man to which the Old Testament only alludes—namely, that of dwelling in men for the purpose of sanctifying them. This indwelling, first of all, produces a conviction of sin.

The converted man is much more conscious of sin than is the unconverted, not because conversion has made him more sinful, but because it has made him more enlightened with reference to sin. The indwelling

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power of the Holy Spirit has given him an insight into the nature of sin and into the true condition of his own life. The Holy Spirit acts then, first of all, as a Reprover.

Furthermore, He acts as a Revealer, disclosing to men the nature of righteousness and the reality of judgment. The natural man cannot perceive much of real value in righteousness beyond, perhaps, the fact that a world made up of decent, honest people is a much better place in which to live than a world made up of the opposite variety. But righteousness has a value even beyond its utilitarian value. Righteousness is the working out of God's will in the life of this world. It therefore has a spiritual value as well as a utilitarian, and this spiritual value is the thing which gives it significance. It takes the Holy Spirit to make a man aware of this.

The Holy Spirit also awakens men to a very solemn realization that all sin must eventually be brought to judgment. To the unregenerate man sin is a mistake. To the man who has been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, sin is an offense against the holiness of God, and such being the case must eventually bring the sinner before the Judgment Seat to be judged for the things done in his body whether they be good or evil.

But the Holy Spirit does more than merely act as a deterrent to evil. He is also a revealer of truth. In his last conversation with his disciples as recorded by John, Jesus told his disciples, "I have yet many things to

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say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16: 12, 13). What does this mean? It means that the spiritual life is a growing thing. Men do not apprehend its meaning or catch its significance all at once. The will of God, as revealed, for instance, in the Bible, is something which a person comes to understand in a satisfying fashion only as the result of patient and prayerful seeking. As one seeks, the Holy Spirit reveals. He is God's spirit of wisdom and understanding brought to bear upon the mind and soul of man. Jesus' promise was that this spirit of truth would lead the believer into all truth. "He shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come." (John 16: 13.)

The Holy Spirit is also a comforter of men's souls. He brings them that solace without which their hearts would break with sorrow. When death and disappointment have swept out of life every joy, it is the Holy Spirit which enables men first to endure and later perhaps to understand; at least to accept with faith and quietness the unsearchable judgments of God. We are told that the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities. In the midst of our weaknesses and temptations we can be sure that the Holy Spirit is our support. He comes to assure us that we can be victors over life, bearing "witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and

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if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8: 16, 17).

In that superb eighth chapter of Romans—than which there is nothing finer in the whole Word of God—Paul gives us a great revelation of what the Spirit may mean to the believer's life. The seventh chapter constitutes the classic description of how a man with a conscience fights an unequal battle with sin. The eighth chapter begins with the assurance of victory through Christ. For the remainder of the chapter Paul recounts how the Spirit, taking possession of the man who has been reconciled to God through Christ, leads him into a final triumph over the promptings of the flesh. The true believer walks not after the flesh, but after the Spirit—spelled with a capital S and meaning the Holy Spirit of God. This indwelling Spirit makes the lustful body dead and confers a new life of righteousness. If we live after the flesh, we die; but if *through the Spirit* we mortify the deeds of the body, we live. As many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God, no longer living in the spirit of bondage, but crying in exultation "Abba, Father," as they live under the Spirit of adoption.

No one who has ever caught the glory of the eighth chapter of Romans can ever again think of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a truth of interest only to technical theologians. He will know Him thereafter as nothing less than the very power of God leading men to right-

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eousness and truth, and bending the affairs of this world into conformity to the will of God.

The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is the declaration of the fundamental fact that the divine life is not static, but dynamic. As some one has said, "God is a living God—not an idea, but a force."<sup>2</sup> God is in the world today in the presence of the Holy Spirit, sustaining his creation, leading men into the ways of truth, doing everything that overflowing spiritual vitality can achieve. The Holy Spirit comes from the Father and the Son and partakes of the spiritual energy and nature of both. In the Holy Spirit the believer shares the life of God. He brings the life of every one who has Christian faith into direct contact with the very essence of God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

In the same manner He brings the believer into contact with the Son. The Holy Spirit did not achieve our salvation; this was the function of the second person of the Trinity. It is now the work of the Holy Spirit to apply to men's hearts the redemption which Christ achieved. The earthly ministry of Jesus Christ and his saving death upon the cross are finished. As Jesus passed into the bosom of the Father, he was heard to cry out, "It is finished" (John 19: 30). The saving

<sup>2</sup> *Meaning of the Creed*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Chapter on the Holy Spirit, by R. G. Parsons; p. 158.

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work of Jesus Christ occurred at a certain definite time in history and was finished on the cross. But the spiritual benefits which his death purchased for us must constantly be applied to our hearts, if they are to do us any good. It was not enough that Christ died for our sins in the reign of Tiberius Caesar; the benefits of his death must be conveyed daily to our needy hearts if Christ's saving works of grace are to mean anything to us. The ever-proceeding Spirit of God, whom we call the Holy Spirit, takes the facts of Christ's redemption and so applies them to the hearts of believing men and women that they experience that stupendous change of character and motives which we call salvation, and are day by day sustained in the living of the divine life.

Pagan religion of the first century was largely a matter of worship; the new Christian faith was primarily a matter of life. It was religion of the Spirit—the Holy Spirit—set over against the dead and static reaction of those dying faiths which regarded divinity as something set apart from the life of man. We never understand Christianity until we realize that our faith starts in the very essence of God and issues in a righteousness which Christ confers.

The medium through which he confers it is the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit.

There has never been a great religious awakening in the history of the Church that has not been occasioned by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Religious revivals

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occur when God sends upon praying men and women a power which transforms their lives and fills them with a new zeal and gladness. In the midst of a world order which seems at times to be almost chaotic, Christians must pin their hope on the fact that God has never failed his people, and that if they will meet the spiritual conditions of faith and surrender, He will pour that Spirit—old as the heavens, yet new as the eager enthusiasm of youth—upon those who with steadfastness wait upon their Lord.

And when the Spirit has been poured out upon all flesh, then shall our sons and our daughters prophesy, our old men shall dream dreams, our young men shall see visions. "And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." (Acts 2: 21.)

## X

### "THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH, THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS"

THE third section of the Creed begins with a declaration of belief in the Holy Ghost. It is not by accident that the next declaration should have to do with the Church. This is a natural sequence. The Church is a creation of the Holy Spirit; it is the organism through which the Holy Spirit most effectively operates in the life of man.

The words "Holy Catholic Church" do not appear in the Apostles' Creed until about the year 400. The word "catholic" was a late addition. The Greek word used in the New Testament for Church is "ecclesia," meaning a gathering together of people for common counsel and action. The Hebrew word for "Church" used in the Old Testament is "kahal," a convocation of Israelites especially for some sacred purpose. God's preparatory revelation of Himself was made to a nation united by one blood. His final and perfected revelation was made to a sacred society united, not by one blood but by one Spirit.

Christianity is essentially social in its nature. It is true that God's challenge is made to individuals. We must all stand as individuals before the judgment seat

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of Christ, both as we are judged day by day amid the common experiences of life, and as we shall be judged on the last great day for the whole of our lives. There is an almost disquieting insistence in the Bible that God deals with men not *en masse* but singly and lovingly as children. But complementing this truth is the equally important truth that God's object is to unite men into a divine society in which they will first be challenged to submit their lives and later be nurtured and glorified by the working of the Spirit.

The Kingdom of heaven, with which so much of Jesus' divine teaching deals, is a social reality. The Church, which is the divine instrument for bringing in the Kingdom, is a social reality also. It is a fact worth noting that seldom in the New Testament do we have an account of the Holy Spirit coming upon an individual. Generally He came upon groups of individuals. The New Testament preserves a perfect balance between man as an individual and man as the member of a group. The appeal of the gospel is to the heart and will of the individual. The fulfillment of man's spiritual life is achieved in the group.

The word "church" is mentioned only twice in the Gospels: once in the sixteenth chapter of Matthew where Christ declares, "Upon this rock I will build my church"; and again in the eighteenth chapter of the same Gospel where he says, "Tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican."

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The question as to whether Christ did or did not found a Church is ground which has been fought over for the past eighteen centuries. The statement to Peter at Caesarea Philippi, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16: 18), has long been used by the Roman Church to substantiate its claim to the primacy of Peter and the spiritual sovereignty of the Pope. But all branches of the Protestant Church have denied the validity of this claim. The original statement ran, "Thou art *Petros*, and upon this *petra* I will build my Church." *Petra* is a feminine form and means rock. *Petros* is a masculine and means a stone hewn out of the rock. The circumstance which called forth this declaration by our Lord was Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of the living God. It was upon a confession that Christ built his church; not upon a man as such, but upon a man voicing the truth as it is in Jesus. The confession was the rock upon which the Church would be built, and the confessors, like Peter, are stones quarried from that rock and built into the Church of God.

The so-called "Great Commission," while it does not specifically mention the Church, certainly implies that Jesus had in mind some kind of an organization—if we may use that term—through which the spread of the gospel would be effected. "Go ye therefore," he said, "and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have

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commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." (Matt. 28: 19, 20.) Does not this seem to imply that although Jesus did not organize the Church in the sense that he suggested or established certain forms of government, he did, nevertheless, definitely provide for the continuance of his ministry by setting his disciples tasks which could not be accomplished unless they associated themselves together for action?

This fact seems to be borne out by what happened on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples constituted them a Church. But Christ sent the Holy Spirit. This is but another way of saying that a Church, throbbing with life and filled with the fullness of the divine Spirit, must undoubtedly have been one of the things Christ came to establish; and that although he scrupulously avoided hampering the extension of the gospel with forms that might be outmoded with the passing of time, his thought was always on the task of deepening the fellowship among his disciples. His concern over their quarrels and disputes about position and honors seems to indicate this. It is hard to escape the conviction that, although Christ said but little about the Church, he always had it in mind. The fact that he seldom mentioned it was probably because he was in the habit of thinking in terms of fellowship rather than in terms of forms.

After Pentecost, and especially after the first persecutions, churches began to be widely established. There

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was no uniformity of organization. The apostles organized churches and ordained elders to administer their affairs. Organization became widely varied. But in the midst of this variety there was a unity which was amazing. How can this be accounted for? Simply by one fact—the Holy Spirit was in all the churches; and while government and administration might be different in different sections of the country, churches everywhere were under the same Spirit. This gave them such a unity of purpose and life that differences in form never seemed to have caused the least controversy.

Wherever a Christian brother went throughout the Roman world he was welcomed by other Christians. They were so filled with the Holy Spirit that they never thought of asking how their sister churches differed from them in government. All they knew was that they all loved the Lord Jesus, that they owed their salvation to him, and that they were daily living in peace and joy and experiencing triumph over the circumstances of life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This was all that was necessary. Anyone who shared this faith and life was a brother beloved. The way he and his associates administered the affairs of their church was a matter of practically no interest.

It might be added that from that time to this churches filled with the Holy Spirit have never busied themselves disputing with their neighbors over forms, and that one unfailing sign of spiritual death in any church or group of churches is widespread interest in

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controversy over administration, forms of worship, and temporal authority.

Paul had a great deal to say about the Church. His conception of it was magnificent. He spoke of the Church as the body of Christ, "the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1: 23). Christian believers, he said, are "members of his body" (Eph. 5: 30). He declared that Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5: 25-27). He also used the figure of a building to describe the Church. Christ, he said, is the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets the foundation, and the individual believers "bulded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2: 22).

In other words, he considered the Church not a mere organization, but a creation of God pulsing with life. Even when he spoke of it as a building, he pictured it as made up of living stones. His view was shared by all other New Testament writers who make mention of the Church. Peter, speaking of believers in Christ, referred to them as "lively stones, . . . built up a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2: 5). The Epistle to the Hebrews refers to "the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12: 23).

The New Testament teaching about the Church is

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not that it is an organization which men started, but something which God Himself created through the agency of the Holy Spirit, just as definitely as He created the world. The Church is the Holy Spirit gathering disciples together and holding them together in the working out of God's holy purposes. It has its origin not on earth but in heaven; not in the will of man but in the will of God.

Two adjectives are used in our present form of the Creed to describe the Church. In the first place the Church is called "Holy." This means that it is purified —set apart for a special purpose. It also means that its members are under the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church is a solidarity, vitalized by the Holy Spirit and maintaining within itself a type of life essentially different in purpose from that of the world.

All attempts in the interest of tolerance and broad-mindedness to make the Church like the world are contrary to the original idea of the Church. The Holy Spirit came upon a group of disciples already separated from their fellows by their allegiance to the crucified and risen Jesus, and by constituting them a Church he intensified this already existing separation. The Church is supposed to be made up of persons who are in the world, yet not of it; who do not separate themselves from the affairs of the world, but try to carry the Spirit and purpose of God into these affairs. The Church increases its power over men's lives to the extent that it emphasizes this separation, and it weakens itself when

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for any reason it seeks to identify itself with the purposes of the world.

This does not mean that the Church is supposed to be a society of people at bitter enmity with the people and enterprises not included within its bounds. It simply means that the Church is holy, purified, and set aside by God to the end that it may render Him a complete and unfaltering service. To do this it has to remain true to his Spirit, and since this Spirit is holy the Church which He sustains must be holy also.

The Church is also catholic. Protestants often hesitate to declare that the Church is catholic, feeling that this signifies an indorsement of the Roman Catholic Church. But this, of course, is not true. The word "catholic" means "universal." As an authority on the Creed has well remarked, "The word 'catholic' to the framers of the Creed had no connection with the See of Rome, or the religion of the Roman Church, with which it is now so unfortunately associated, but meant simply the universal Church among nations, speaking different languages, yet holding one and the same faith."<sup>1</sup> Where the Spirit of Christ is, there is the Church, and nowhere else. To the extent that the Church of Rome shares this Spirit it is part of the universal or catholic Church of Christ. To the extent Protestant churches share this same Spirit, they also are catholic. The word was first adopted to indicate

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Fundamentals*, by A. C. Baird, p. 197. Scribners.

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that the Church owes its allegiance to "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," and that where this allegiance exists, there is the Church of Christ. Nothing but the Spirit can give the Church its authority. The Holy Spirit created the Church, and unless He informs and guides its life the Church is dead. Since this Spirit is not a local but a universal reality, the Church of his creation is universal also.

The statement "the communion of saints" is both interesting and important.

These words first occur in the Creed of Niceta, Bishop of Rimisiana, in Dacia, about the year 400. They were not part of the original Creed. But that they have a very fitting place in a statement of Christian faith becomes quite apparent when we examine their meaning.

The word "saint" has largely lost the meaning it had in the primitive Church. It means today a special group of worthies who by their distinguished service and consecration have been accorded special honor in the history of the Church. Also, the word is sometimes applied to living Christians of outstanding devotion. But in the early Church the word "saint" meant "the saved," and also carried with it the idea that these "saved" are not only purified from the sins of the world but set apart from the world for God's service.

The Greek word for "communion" is "koinonia" and has a variety of meanings. It may mean fellowship

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that the members of the living Church have with God; fellowship with Christ that members of the Church enjoy through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; the fellowship of the Holy Spirit; and lastly, a feeling of oneness which the disciples experienced as partakers of a common heritage of faith, as joint-sharers in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

It is this last meaning of the word "communion" which is employed in the declaration that we believe in "the communion of saints." This fits in with the original meaning of the word "saint." As the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it, since all believers are united to Christ by his Spirit, then, "being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces; and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man."<sup>2</sup>

Spiritually, the Church is the body of Christ; practically, it is the fellowship of believers. It is a brotherhood which transcends race and nationality. Men may erect barriers between themselves and other men and races, but Christ came to break down the middle wall of partition between us. Paul assured the Colossians that "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3: 11).

<sup>2</sup> *Confession of Faith*, Ch. XXVI.

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In the villages and the teeming cities of the Roman Empire there were little groups of men and women, a nation within a nation. Above the Emperor they had a king, one Jesus. He had never gone out of the world. Through the Holy Spirit his grace was still brought to their hearts. In these groups master and slave knelt side by side, women of high estate felt a kinship with believing women who had experienced all the sinful inclemencies of the world, which they could not feel for unbelieving women of their own station. Under the outstretched hands of Christ, hovering in benediction over his people, all men were equal. They were content that all sorts of inequalities, just and unjust alike, should exist among them in the things of the world, which were trivial; in the great things of their common Lord and Master, they were equal. Something even higher than the highest ideals of democracy obtained among them. This thing was fellowship; and fellowship of such a high order that they used the Greek word "koinonia" to describe it.

In the spiritual reaches of life, high above the trivialities of rank, wealth, and culture which separated them, their lives blended together in a joy and power of which the Living Christ was the source. There in that unseen fellowship they lived a common life. They were joined by bonds stronger than blood and nationality to divers conditions of men the world over. Just as differences of rank could not separate them from those who were near at hand, so distance could not

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separate them from those who were far away. Their love for the brethren reached across the Great Sea and over trackless miles of desert. Men in their huts of turf and reeds along the Nile were brethren beloved by those of Caesar's household. In the last chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, Paul conveys the greetings of Timothy, Luke, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus to Roman Christians separated by a distance which few men ever traverse—to Priscilla and Aquila, Urbane and Apelles, Rufus and Hermas, Nereus and Olympas. Most of them had never seen those to whom they sent greetings and perhaps never would, but they were one because the Holy Spirit was one and because they acknowledged one Lord and Master.

Our missionary movement brings this home to us today as nothing else can. We sometimes marvel at the way a dead church is stirred with a new zeal when it responds to the challenge of missions. But there is nothing strange about this. Christianity is essentially a missionary religion. A church or group of churches which fails to realize this is seeking the blessings of only a partial gospel. The full gospel takes in the whole world. The reason why a church afire with missionary zeal becomes a real home for the souls of men and a citadel of righteousness and good influence in the community in which it is located, is that that church is responding to the *whole* gospel, which includes "*the communion of saints.*" That religion which is content to busy itself only with its own local interests is not

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Christianity. The Holy Spirit never blesses such a church. The first thing the Holy Spirit did to the believers on Pentecost was to constitute them a glad company of persons who "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" (Acts 2: 42). Thus the Church began, and thus it must continue if it would please Christ.

The Church is both visible and invisible. It includes not only those living persons who acknowledge the lordship of Christ, but that unnumbered multitude who have died in the Lord and have gone before to glory. The Church is a solidarity. It is the creation of God. It has substance and reality above its earthly organizations. It is divine and unseen, as well as practical and of the earth. Based on the confession of those who declare Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and live a life of trust in the promises God has made through him, it continues to this very hour a sacred society wherein, through the Holy Spirit, men find rest to their souls. And to the soul of man it is commissioned by God Himself to minister, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4: 13).

## XI

### "THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS"

THE forgiveness of sins is the reality about which the whole Creed centers. It has been called the central blessing of the gospel.

The first article of the Creed declares that God is our Father, and that He is in control of his universe. Our anxiety to be assured of the fatherly goodness and power of God arises from our hope that He will save us by forgiving our sins. The second article of the Creed deals with Jesus Christ. The truth it sets forth is that Jesus Christ is the divine Saviour from sin, who by his death redeemed us, by his rising gave us new hope, and in his present exaltation continues to intercede in our behalf. The declaration about the Holy Spirit assures us that God is still in the world, working through his Church to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Thus we see that the forgiveness of sins is indeed the great issue with which the whole Creed deals. It was to bring about this forgiveness that revelation occurred. God seems to have but one plan for men's souls and it is a very simple one—namely, to lead them by love to ally themselves to Him and his purposes by forswearing their own willful ways and accepting his. This turning

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away from sin and casting one's self in perfect trust on the mercy of God is called repentance. The blotting out of our past transgression on God's part is called forgiveness. To this redemptive purpose God pledges Himself many times in the Bible, and in the life and death of Jesus and the giving of the Holy Spirit He fulfills his pledge.

The reality toward which the whole of revelation is directed and in which revelation is fulfilled is the forgiveness of sins.

What do we mean when we say that we believe in the forgiveness of sins?

In order to answer that question we have to make clear to our minds what we believe about sin, for unless we are quite sure what is the nature of that thing for which we must be forgiven, we cannot appreciate the value of what God gives us in forgiveness. We must know the nature of our bondage before we can have a due sense of the privilege of release.

The popular idea of sin is varied in its nature. Some hold that sin is a mistake. It arises from ignorance; when humanity is sufficiently enlightened, sin will disappear. Others maintain that sin is an incident of growth; it is goodness in the making. Those who think in terms of evolutional theories prevalent a generation ago hold that man is the victim of heredity and environment and therefore not responsible for his transgression. Probably the most widely held idea is that

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sin is the quite understandable result of weak human nature, and that the good God who made human nature as it is will largely overlook what its weakness produces.

Against all such ideas the Biblical idea stands in profound contrast. Whereas all popular ideas of sin assume that sin is an act, the Bible, and particularly the New Testament, maintains that sin is an inner state of corruption which results in wrong acts. "Conviction of sin involves as its most uniform and prominent element not merely a conviction that our actions fail to come up to the popular standard of excellence, but a sense that in the depths of our nature, below and beyond the reach of volition, we are spiritually dead and polluted, and impotent and insensible to divine things."<sup>1</sup> In the sixth and seventh chapters of his Epistle to the Romans, Paul speaks of sin as a bondage, as something that reigns in the bodies of the unregenerate. Human capacities are instruments which sin uses for the perpetrating of its wicked designs. He says that sin deceived him and slew him, until he was compelled to do what he abhorred doing, and by the power of this evil domination over his soul he was prevented from doing the things his best nature prompted.

This is but the personal testimony of one of God's great servants to a condition of soul which the Bible maintains is common to all men. To be sure, not all men are equally conscious of such a state of soul. It

<sup>1</sup> Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, p. 318. Bible Institute.

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is surprising to discover the greatest confessions of sin not in the utterances or writing of great sinners, but in those of the saints. Evil men are seldom conscious of their sin, or if they are conscious of it they either make light of it or scoff at the seriousness with which others regard it. We have to look to the saints for confession of sin. Paul called himself the chief of sinners; and from that day to this every man touched by the Spirit of God has brought forth as the first fruits of repentance a deep sense of the hideous nature of sin, and particularly a sense of how completely sin alienates him from God. Sin—unacknowledged, unconfessed, unrepented—stands like a closed door between the earthly child and the heavenly Father.

What does this teach us of the nature of sin? Evidently this: that sin is not this act or that, but a corruption of man's nature which eventuates in evil acts. Sin is that disease of the soul which causes us not only to do wrong things, but to live our lives indifferent to the purposes of God or impudently defiant of them. It is an inner corruption which spreads to every particular act, robs it of spiritual significance, and puts the will under bondage.

The Bible defines sin as lawlessness. In the First Epistle of John (3: 4, R. V.), we find the declaration, "Sin is lawlessness." But the fact that it is such a hideous and devastating reality clearly indicates that something more is involved than the breaking of mere human laws. Sin is such a solemn and awful fact because it involves

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the breaking of God's law. In other words, it is an offense against the holiness of God. We must look at sin from God's standpoint to understand it. Looked at from the human standpoint, the evil of sin is to be measured by the evil results it produces. Viewed from God's standpoint, sin is an attitude of disobedience toward the whole plan and purpose of the spiritual universe; and such being the case, its seriousness arises not primarily from its results but primarily from its nature.

Evil thoughts and desires are therefore sinful as evil acts are sinful. The man who looks in lust has committed adultery in his heart already. The man who covets anything which is his neighbor's has sinned against the Most High. Sin keeps God and man apart not primarily because the evil acts of man spoil the righteous plans of God, but because God with his holy purposes and man with his sinful desires cannot have fellowship one with the other.

Jesus Christ came to save man, not only from the folly of his acts, but from that eternal death which is the result of alienation from God. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance," writes Paul, "that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners . . ." (1 Tim. 1: 15). At his birth the name Jesus was given him by divine command because he would save his people from their sins. When John the Baptist first beheld Jesus, he cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1: 29). He might have hailed Jesus with many

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other titles which would have indicated his divine significance; but this kinsman of Jesus, whose undefiled life made possible an unusual insight into spiritual matters, hailed him as the one who "taketh away the sin of the world." In his own preaching Jesus assured his hearers not only that God was willing to forgive sin, but that what their poor lives most needed was the release and inner cleansing which such forgiveness would bring. To him sin was a hopeless perversion of man's inner life which paralyzed the will and corrupted the desires.

Man must do more than merely be sorry for certain wrong acts; he must be born again. Nicodemus was a leader in Israel, but according to Jesus he knew nothing because he did not know this, that a man must be inwardly cleansed and spiritually vitalized before he can begin living as God would have him live. No attempted conformity to law, even to divine law, could be substituted for that transformation of the heart which the coming of God's grace, and that alone, could produce.

The Apostles preached the same message. They presented Jesus to their amazed and mystified hearers as the one whose significance lies in the fact that he confers upon men the forgiveness of sin. "To him give all the prophets witness," declared Peter, "that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10: 43). "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins"

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(Acts 5: 31). When Paul had his profound experience on the road to Damascus, it was the risen Christ himself who declared to Paul that he was sent to the Gentiles, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive *forgiveness of sins*, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26: 18).

So we see that the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins has been made central in Christian faith, not by the devices of man, but according to the purpose of God. It was to bring about the forgiveness of sin that He purposed the plan which came to its consummation in the life and death of Jesus. It can be maintained with full confidence of Scriptural support that the primary reason for the Incarnation and the Atonement was that man might receive remission of sin. Christianity is the religion of forgiveness. Before anything else it promises forgiveness, and by the same token its primary demand on man is the demand for repentance.

Forgiveness is offered to all men; it is given, however, only to those who repent. Jesus began his ministry not by proclaiming to men that he was the Son of God, but by calling upon them to repent. "Repent ye," he said, "and believe the gospel" (Mark 1: 15).

The word "repent" means to change one's mind. It means a great deal more than mere sorrow for sin; it means abandonment of sin. It consists of something

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more than calling ourselves hard names. Repentance, when it is sincere, results in settlement with sin. It is repentance *from* sin, not of sin or for sin.<sup>2</sup> The whole attitude of the truly repentant man is changed. The time never comes, of course, when a man ceases to be a sinner. Repentance does not produce perfection; but what it does produce is a permanently changed attitude toward sin whereby the repentant man henceforth hates his sin, surrenders it into the hands of God, relinquishes any hold upon it which in his weakness he may have cherished, and trusts in the power of God to save him in the future from its devastating influence. Sin may overcome him again, but what it overcomes now is not a willing and fascinated victim, but one who has definitely established himself on God's side and hates and opposes sin with the whole strength of a renewed heart.

Frequently we hear people scoff at repentance because it seems to be a too easy escape from the consequences of sin. But it should always be borne in mind that the only escape which true repentance promises is escape from the *guilt* of sin. It does not promise escape from the *consequences* of sin. In his mercy God sometimes removes the consequences of sin as well as the guilt of sin, but repentance carries with it no such promise. If God removes the consequences of sin, this is purely an act of mercy on God's part. No man can repent, therefore, with the assurance that he has settled his accounts

<sup>2</sup> In Greek always *ἀπό* and *ἐκ*, never *περὶ* or *ἐπι*.

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with God and man. If he does it in that spirit, he has settled with neither. There is nothing cheap and easy about repentance.

The question is often asked whether a deathbed repentance is ever valid. It is if it is sincere repentance. To be sorry for one's sin, or fearful of the consequences, is not repentance. To disavow sins in old age to which one would eagerly return if he had the vitality of youth is not repentance. There are probably few deathbed repents which are sincere and genuine. Sin hardens men in such a dreadful fashion that few people after a life of unrighteousness are capable of turning from their sin and casting themselves in truly penitent spirit on the mercy of God. But when they can so turn and do, the mercy of God is waiting to receive them. Though they come at the eleventh hour and put themselves trustingly in the hands of God, the Lord of the Vineyard gives to them as he gave to those who bore the burden and heat of the day.

One thing more should be said about penitence. It is not an act which has its origin solely in the will of man. Sincere repentance is not possible apart from faith. Men do not become truly sorry for their sins unless and until they come to put some trust at least in powers above their own. Every element of true religion goes back to God. While repentance is the responsibility of the individual, it is also true that the individual neither can nor does repent apart from the

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grace and love of God. The heavenly Father not only accepts a man's repentance; He makes it possible.

Now the thing to which repentance leads is forgiveness. We are justified in God's sight by faith. That faith leads to repentance. The immediate result of repentance is the full and complete forgiveness of God.

Just as repentance on the part of man cannot be a cheap and easy matter, so neither can the forgiveness of God be accorded on a cheap and easy basis. God does not forget sin; He forgives it. And for God to forgive sin is infinitely harder than for man to forgive it. Frequently we hear the assertion that since God is love the full and free forgiveness of all his creatures is to be expected from Him. Since God knows our weaknesses, should He not, consistently with his loving purpose, be willing to overlook much of man's iniquity and forgive him freely?

Such queries arise from a false and insufficient idea both of the nature of sin and of the nature of God. Sin is an offense against the holiness of God. It is a matter of much more serious import than even the most consecrated follower of Jesus Christ can appreciate. An offense against God is a far more serious matter than any offense one man may commit against another. It has a cosmic significance. To break the laws of God or to fail to conform to them is an offense which carries with it an infinite penalty. Since this is the nature of sin—and every syllable of revelation assures us it is—

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God cannot regard sin lightly. To do so would mean to contradict and do violence to his nature, one element of which is justice. When man breaks the laws of God, justice demands that he receive an infinite punishment. The moral universe would quickly be converted into chaos if God did not bind Himself with undeviating strictness to the requirements of those principles of justice which are part of his nature. Sin and punishment constitute a sequence of cause and effect which God is bound by his moral nature to observe. If He responded only to the principle of love which is part of his nature, He might be disposed to forgive men freely just because He knows their weaknesses and is merciful. But God's forgiveness must satisfy both his divine attributes of justice and of love. His forgiveness must be consistent with the whole of his divine nature.

The vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ makes God's forgiveness of man's sin possible because it makes possible a forgiveness which meets the full demands both of divine justice and of divine love. In Jesus Christ, who voluntarily assumed the punishment due our sins, the demands of divine justice were fully met. God punished sin in him. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor. 5: 21.) In the cross of Christ God passed his infinite condemnation upon sin. The wages of sin is death, and in the death

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of Christ God pronounced his measureless condemnation upon sin.

But what is equally important, God showed forth his measureless love in the cross. He loved mankind enough to give his only begotten Son—of the same substance with Him and equal with Him in glory—for man's salvation; and since Christ is the second person of the godhead and one with the Father, this is the same as saying that in the cross God Himself suffered for man's sin. We cannot imagine any way in which God could so effectively have shown forth his condemnation of sin as He did in the sufferings and death of Christ, nor can the human mind conceive any such expression of love as that shown forth in the cross whereby God Himself paid the penalty for man's sin and thereby rescued him from eternal death. God identified Himself with man in the Incarnation, and by suffering in the sinner's place made possible a forgiveness of sin that at one and the same time met the full requirements of his nature for perfect justice and perfect love.

The full significance of the Atonement will never be grasped by these finite minds of ours. As some one has said, "Were the cross not too great for our minds to fathom, it would not be great enough for the needs of our hearts."<sup>3</sup> We cannot fully understand how by

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Clarence E. Macartney, *Things Most Surely Believed*, p. 173. Cokesbury Press.

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the vicarious sacrifice of the God-Man the guilt of sin is removed and man restored again to the favor of God, but that this actually occurs millions of the redeemed in every age have borne glad witness. As the redeemed man in his recitation of the Creed makes the declaration, "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," his heart thrills with a sense of God's great love and his life is established anew in spiritual security.

Forgiveness is God's greatest gift to the human heart. What are health, riches, and position compared with this? In this great experience of forgiveness man gets right with God; and when a man is right with his God, of what consequence are the circumstances of life, whether they work for good or for evil? The great issue has been settled. Man has repented and God has forgiven. The Father runs down the pathway with open arms, and the Prodigal, his back turned upon the far country, sinks into the loving embrace and murmurs, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." But the Father says, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

The reason why the reading of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32) stirs the hearts of us all is that we are all sinners. Jesus did not have to explain this parable to his disciples. He does not have

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to explain it to us. We see the point. God is the Father and we are the Prodigal; and that return is the experience we have all had when, after a sojourn in a far country, we have felt ourselves wrapped again in the reassuring arms of God and have been told that we were forgiven.

From this forgiveness every spiritual grace begins to flow. When we are forgiven, we know that we belong to God; and when we belong to God, life has no mishap or sorrow we cannot surmount. Then do our broken lives mount up with wings as eagles; we run and are not weary; we walk and do not faint.

## XII

### "THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING"

THE statement originally was "resurrection of the flesh." With one exception,<sup>1</sup> all early creeds used the word "flesh" instead of "body" in this connection.

Some scholars have made much of the fact that the New Testament makes no mention whatsoever of the resurrection of the flesh, but speaks always of the resurrection of the body in describing the final act of human destiny. Harnack has gone so far as to say that "in her conception of the resurrection and the life everlasting as the 'resurrection of the flesh' the post-Apostolic Church overstepped the line commonly observed in the oldest preaching."

But there was a reason for this. The Docetists, those heretics who caused so much trouble in the early Church, professed to despise the flesh, and the teachers who followed the original Apostles probably did go a step beyond the actual declaration of Scripture in their zeal to combat the destructive teachings of the Docetists.

And well they might lean backward to combat these heresies, because they carried with them certain moral

<sup>1</sup> *Creed of Constantinople*, 381 A.D.

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or, it might better be said, immoral implications which were ruinous. The Docetists went so far as to maintain that since the flesh is nothing and a man's spirit alone has value, he may indulge the inconsequential flesh as much as he pleases, provided he tries to maintain the spirit of Christ in his heart. As this extraordinary teaching was actually resulting in gross immorality on the part of certain who professed to be Christians, the orthodox teachers naturally reacted to a position somewhat beyond the actual teachings of the New Testament when they declared that humanity would some day experience a resurrection of the *flesh*, instead of a resurrection of the body as the New Testament affirms.

But "resurrection of the body" is the statement of the Creed today. It is the triumphant declaration, based on revelation, that in the final consummation of all things every factor of human personality, including the bodies in which we reside, will experience a glorified renewal which will fit them for perfect adaptability in the spiritual world. Practically every religion in the world has taught the survival of the soul after death. The Christian religion goes a step further and teaches that this survival will not be the survival of disembodied spirits, but the survival of souls instrumented with bodies which the omnipotent power of God has fashioned for perfect utility in a spiritual order of life. Philosophy, when it has been at all friendly to the ideal of survival, has taught simply the immortality of the

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soul. We are told that Jesus brought immortality to light. That is, by his own resurrection he demonstrated that the final destiny of the believer will be a life lived in a body having a definite connection with the body he possessed on this side of the grave, but transformed and fitted to higher ends.

To many people this appears a step down, a teaching somewhat lacking in nobility as compared with the pure and elevated conception of the survival of spirit alone, and the extinction of flesh. But as a matter of fact, the Christian teaching is by far the nobler. It declares that in the great culmination of human affairs everything that has value will be preserved and raised by the divine power to a higher usefulness. The earth and the heavens are to be renewed. "We look," says St. Peter, "for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Peter 3: 13). At the same time all men are to receive bodies which will fit them for the estate to which they go. The impenitent and lost will receive bodies corresponding to their inner corruption and fit for their lost estate. The saved will receive bodies like the glorious body of Christ; and this will all occur according to the mighty working of Him who is able to subdue all things unto Himself.

There are two objections generally advanced against the belief in the resurrection of the body.

The first is that flesh is the enemy of spirit and that the final triumph of the spirit will mean not the pres-

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ervation of the flesh but its annihilation. The New Testament, however, dissents from such a view. It denies that there is anything essentially evil about the flesh. God would not have chosen incarnation as the mode of revealing Himself had flesh in its essence been the enemy of the spirit. Evidently there was nothing essentially evil about the flesh of the Virgin Mary. No worshiper of Jesus Christ would maintain that the divine Son of God was housed in a body which was by its very nature vile.

The New Testament is characterized by a wholesome and robust realism. It recognizes only one evil thing in God's created universe and that is sin, having its origin not in the will of God but in the willfulness of man. God's created universe is good. Human flesh is good. It becomes evil only when sinful men make it so. When One Being in the flesh perfectly submitted to the will of God, flesh was on that occasion demonstrated not to be evil but to be the glorious instrument by which God accomplished his chief purpose in the life of man. The whole teaching of the New Testament is that the Christian believer will share the destiny of his Lord. If flesh was not evil in the life of Christ, it need not be evil in our lives unless we in our sinfulness make it evil. Since Christ in his risen state had a transformed physical body, we in our risen state will possess the same.

The second objection to the belief in the resurrection of the body arises from the contention that it is absurd

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to believe that the particles of the body will ever be reassembled once they have dissolved in the grave. To which we readily reply, "Of course it is, and neither the Bible nor the Creed teaches any such thing." There is no indication that the physical bodies we have will ever be revived in their original form once they have decomposed. Our bodies in the heavenly state will be what Paul calls spiritual bodies, and these spiritual bodies will not be substitutes for the physical body, but bodies which are the definite outgrowth of the physical bodies which were laid in the grave.

The fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians, verses 20-58, explains this matter to the fullest extent that a divine mystery can be explained. Paul says that certain in the Corinthian church are asking, "How are the dead raised up, and with what manner of body do they come?" He goes on to explain that that which is sown does not spring into growth until it dies. Furthermore, the plant which develops is not at all like the seed that was sown, but God gives to each seed a body as it pleases Him, and to every seed his own body. There are different kinds of flesh also. Man has a variety of flesh which fits him for his life as a man. Animals have another kind of flesh, and fish and birds still different flesh, adapting them to their several varieties of existence. Among the heavenly bodies also there is a difference. "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of

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the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory."

From this analogy Paul goes on to declare that the resurrection of the body will partake of this general tendency in the physical universe. The body, sown in corruption, will be raised in incorruption; sown in dis-honor, it will be raised in glory; sown in weakness, it will be raised in power; *sown a natural body, it will be raised a spiritual body.* The term "spiritual body" does not mean a body composed of spirit, which would be a contradiction in terms. It means a body which will be perfectly adapted to the requirements of a spiritual world. Being physical descendants of Adam, we have a body such as he had, a physical body, bearing the image of earthly existence. But by faith we are to be the spiritual heirs of Christ. We shall therefore in the resurrection receive bodies which, like Christ's, bear the image of the heavenly. The corruptible will put on incorruption, the mortal will put on immortality, and death, through Jesus Christ, will be swallowed up in victory.

Note this: There is no indication here that the par-ticles of our present bodies will ever again be reassembled. In the general resurrection we shall receive spiritual bodies. But just as the grain of wheat planted in the ground decays, yet out of its very dissolution produces something absolutely different in nature and appearance from the seed which was planted, so the dissolution of our bodies in the grave will, on the last

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great day, eventuate in the emergence of a transformed body which will be perfectly suited to our celestial existence. But this will not be the substitution of one body for another. It will be the transformation of the body of our death into the body of our glory. It will be the final raising up of the whole of our earthly lives, save their sins, to a new and glorified level of existence which the finite mind cannot comprehend, but which our faith leads us to believe will be our eternal destiny.

Nothing can be nobler in conception than this. Mere survival may be not a blessing but a curse. The Buddhist recognizes this to be so, and his idea of heaven is a cessation of existence. In the Greek religion, and, even in the early teachings of the Old Testament, survival beyond the grave is not pictured as anything particularly desirable. A century before the birth of Christ, however, the belief is said to have been current among cultured Pharisees that in the future life we shall have bodies, but angelic bodies, "made from the light and glory of God."<sup>2</sup> Jesus refuted the teachings of the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection of the body, implying, as Baillie suggests, that "to refuse to contemplate the possibility of such an embodiment is 'not to know the power of God.'"<sup>3</sup>

What he maintained in his teachings he demonstrated

<sup>2</sup> See *And the Life Everlasting*, Baillie, p. 162. Scribners.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

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in his resurrection. His tomb was empty. His body did not experience corruption. In this particular his experience was different from that of his followers, save those who will be living at the time of his Second Coming. His physical body, never having been corrupted by sin, was immediately transformed into the body of his glory.

These sinful bodies of ours will experience corruption. God will fashion for us, however, out of the dissolved physical body a body which will be a fit instrument for these souls in glory. But the spiritual body will have sprung from the decomposed natural body as the plant springs from the decomposed seed. And as the plant in its maturity is more glorious than the mere seed which was planted, so our spiritual bodies will outshine in glory to an immeasurable degree the bodies which were buried in the grave.

The Creed ends with a declaration of belief in the life everlasting.

There are great differences in belief as to where the soul goes immediately after death. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that unbaptized adults and those who have subsequently lost the grace of baptism by mortal sin and who die unreconciled to the Church go immediately to hell. The great mass of partially sanctified believers, however, dying in fellowship with the Church yet still encumbered with imperfections, go to purgatory, where they suffer until their sins are purged out

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and atoned for; but afterward they are translated into heaven. Many Protestants, especially in the Church of England, believe that there is an intermediate region, one for the disembodied spirits of the impenitent and the other for those of the saved, wherein they will abide until the general resurrection. Others believe in a sleep of the soul until the day of resurrection. The belief held by most Protestant bodies is that the souls of the saved go immediately after death to paradise, where they abide until the time of the general resurrection, when they will receive their bodies. The lost, on the other hand, go immediately to hell, where they also abide until the time of the general resurrection, when they will receive their bodies unto condemnation. Therefore, the present state of the saved dead is heaven without bodies, while the present state of the lost dead is hell without bodies.

But where we go after death is not nearly so important as what we shall be after death.

We must begin all reasoning on this subject with the full realization that the Bible teaches the awful doctrine of lost souls. There is not a syllable of the Word which indicates that all men will eventually be saved, or that there is a second chance for those who have died impenitent. Terrible as it is to contemplate, we must face the fact that none other than Jesus himself taught not only that certain souls will be lost, but that they will suffer for all time for their sins (see Matt. 25: 41, 46; Matt. 8: 12; Mark 3: 29). It should make every

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man tremble to read the warnings of the New Testament as to the lot of the impenitent. They are to suffer the loss of all good, to spend eternity in the company of the wicked, to be under the positive condemnation of God, and to suffer.

Were we not able to turn to the divine promises made to those who in faith accept the divine offer of salvation, the prospect would indeed be dismal. But to every man God offers the fullness of divine grace, and to those regenerated by the Holy Spirit God makes such promises of glory that imagery and symbolism can only feebly suggest the glories of the believing dead. "For I reckon," said Paul, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. . . . The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. . . . We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8, portions of verses 18-23).

The declaration of the Creed that we believe in life everlasting means in the first place that we believe in life without end. The first characteristic of life beyond the grave is that it will never terminate. Here in the midst of the temporal we can aspire to it through faith confident that when in the providence of God it becomes ours it becomes ours forever. We shall not grow

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old amid its joys and have them at last pass from us. Perhaps time, as many philosophers have believed, is only a category of the mind. Here in the midst of the finite it is impossible to think of anything save against the background of time. It may well be that when we pass out of the seen order into the unseen we shall pass out of an order where time is a finite mode of measurement into a sphere where such measurement is neither required nor existent. At any rate, we are assured that the life of glory, as well as the life of condemnation, will be endless.

But mere endlessness of life would not in itself be a blessing were we not assured in the Word of God that this life is of a quality which makes it infinitely desirable. As John Baillie has observed in his recent work, *And the Life Everlasting*, "Eternal life stands primarily not for a greater length of life but for a new depth of it. . . . The soul's hope has not been for more of the same but for something altogether higher and better."<sup>4</sup> The Bible says that eternal life is "to know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17: 3). It is, therefore, not just a life which goes on forever, but a rare and exquisite quality of living which knowledge of God and communion with Christ alone make possible. To have eternal life means to come into living and vital contact with the source

<sup>4</sup> Page 244.

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of all life, to embrace its goodness, to submit to its requirements, to partake of its peace and blessedness.

The sign and seal of this eternal life is love. When we have it, we pass from the death of a self-centered life into a life of love and goodwill for all kinds and conditions of men. Eternal life is, in a word, a quality of life so lived above the purposes of the world and so intensely inward in its joys, that when men experience it they know of a truth that they are being caught up in the great stream of universal Life itself. It begins here on earth; it finds its consummation in the life beyond. As soon as a man has found Christ he has found eternal life, and when he has found eternal life, he has begun to have a foretaste of its eternal joys. Hate gives way to love; zeal for the things of the spirit takes the place of indifference; righteousness makes its uncompromising demands upon a being who now accepts them with gladness. All things are made new because the whole of existence has been infused with a new quality of living.

It is this new life, begun here and now, with the divine promise of its perfect fulfillment in the eternity of God, that the Creed declares to be the final destiny of the believer. In heaven he will find the fulfillment of all his powers. The imperfections of this life will fall from his shoulders as a worn garment. In the Father's house are many mansions—there will be degrees of blessedness and honor, proportioned to the capacity and fidelity of each soul. There will be reunion . . .

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fellowship with the saintly of all ages . . . knowledge, service, worship; best of all, communion with Christ and with the Most High God.

The Creed begins with the declaration, "I believe in God the Father Almighty . . ." It ends with the glorious affirmation that we shall one day share the divine life. The Apostle John, probably just a few years before his translation into glory and in thoughtful anticipation of the event, summarized for the believers of all ages the mystery and half-revealed glory of it all when he said: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3: 2.)







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